EGAN

Holworthy Hall

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EGAN

BY

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"The Man Nobody Knew," etc.

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TO

DARRAGH DE LANCEY

AND

MAJOR ROBERT S. BOOTH

AND

THE OFFICIAL OFFICE CIGAR

FOREWORD

The city of "Plainfield, Ohio," and all the characters pictured in this book are purely imaginary.

EGAN

I

IN the smoking compartment of the Cincinnati Pullman there were three men; one of them was Bronson Egan, and for that reason there had been little conversation for the past half hour.

In Egan's favour, it must be understood at the outset that the provocation was great, and that ordinarily he was a man of indulgent tendencies, capable of stoicism even in the presence of those who infest the pathways of the returning soldier and inquire blithely as to the personal habits of Black Jack Pershing, the sensations of the human organism under fire, and the exact procedure by which the soldier won his decorations. Normally, he could have withstood any amount of this railway bromide; and if his mood had chanced to be playful, he would probably have monopolized the entire discourse from station to station, creating for his listeners a vivid series of extravaganzas, based on pure imagination, coloured with wild adventure, absurd, impossible, and yet to be believed because of Egan's drama and convincingness, and to be excused because it was what the listeners liked to hear.

Today, however, because he was nearing home, his mood was far less playful than it had been for fifty months. Indeed, he was fundamentally serious. Glory, riches and a girl were waiting for him, and there

would be a shadow of sadness, too, for reminder that the world wasn't all of his own choosing. He found himself dwelling more upon the sadness than upon the happiness. And from the moment of his entry into the smoking compartment, where he had hoped to meditate in peace, or at least without direct interruption, he had fallen under the annoyance of a cross-examination which took prompt rise from the fact that Egan was still in uniform.

He had answered, courteously enough, every question asked of him by a fatuous jewelry salesman in black-and-white checks and sundry diamonds, and by an older, florid gentleman in Palm Beach fabric and perspiration, but his final illustration of courtesy under pressure had in it somewhat of the smothering quality of a fire-extinguisher. As a result of it, the compartment was flooded with refreshing silence, while the other occupants stared hard at Egan, and wondered, with the slightly constrained interest of stayers-at-home, how much of a part Egan himself had really played in making the world safe for democracy, and for them.

Unconscious of their none too deferential scrutiny, Egan lounged in the window-corner, gazing straight out at the level Ohio landscape, and rolling between his thumb and forefinger, absent-mindedly, an unlighted cigarette. His expression was neither sullen nor melancholy; but it reflected deep introspection. His face, long and a trifle thin, was heavily tanned; and at the corners of his unusually bright and active eyes were myriads of tiny wrinkles like those which aged mariners wear as a badge of long devotion to their calling. The shape of his head was boyish, and its crown of thick

brown hair was juvenile in its waywardness; but his lower face, with its strong and well-formed jaw and its rather wide mouth, tight-lipped at the present moment, was by contrast strikingly mature. By the calendar, he was in the medium twenties; judged by the standard of war-experience, he was a time-worn veteran.

He was in the uniform of a First Lieutenant of the Air Service, and looked well in it. Above the left-hand pocket of his blouse he wore the tarnished silver insignia, the wings, shield and star, of a Junior Military Aviator; and just beneath it, three ribbon bars in a mathematically straight line — the familiar narrow red and green of the *Croix de Guerre;* the less known, less frequent tricolour of our own Distinguished Service Cross, and a third bar which the jewelry salesman had been briefly told on application, represented the *Croce al Merito di Guerra* of Italy. On the left sleeve of Egan's blouse were four wide gold chevrons, to denote at least two years of service with the American Expeditionary Force. On his right sleeve he wore the wound stripe.

Now the jewelry salesman had carefully acquainted the gentleman in the Palm Beach suit, during the course of their mutual investigation of Egan, with his own great efforts to win the war, and the heart-gnawing failure of his dearest plans for still more heroic and self-sacrificing labour — plans which were permanently dampened before fulfilment and even before trial, by the cessation of hostilities. He had regretted, parenthetically but with good voice, that the armistice had been signed before his number was reached in the draft. His disappointment was almost greater than he could bear;

his only permanent satisfaction, he said, wagging his head mournfully, was in his consciousness that he had bought Liberty Bonds until it hurt — but it did seem to him a national disgrace that McAdoo hadn't protected the market so that a patriot wouldn't have had to sell out at 94.36 in order to get his money back. He had bought three thousand dollars' worth, he said, and if any man questioned the statement he could produce the receipt of the bank from which he had bought them, and also of the broker through whom he had sold them. In fact, he had them in his pocket now, and if anybody cared to look at them . . .

Palm Beach had glanced at Egan's shoulders, and remarked that Ordnance had thrice offered him a lieutenant-colonelcy: but, like Cæsar, he had thrice refused the kingly crown because it didn't fit him. He had reasoned that a civilian could do so much more than an officer to speed up production that it was a deed of actual patriotism to decline. It would have been a pleasant honour, and a pleasant remembrance, but after all, a man's duty to his country was as he saw it, and he had simply obeyed his conscience. But it had made him very tired, after the work he had done and the honour he had refused, to have the Provost-Marshal General draft the majority of his skilled mechanics, and then have the Chief of Ordnance expect him to produce at constantly increasing speed. The Government should have struck a balance, somehow.

"Couldn't you train women?" Checks and Diamonds had inquired pertly. "Or wouldn't they wear overalls, or what? My wife read in a magazine somewhere —"

"Training be hanged! *I* don't run any trade school

— that's not in my line! There wasn't time, anyway. That was up to the Department of Labor. They had a Committee on dilution and training, and they started out to make a survey of what the country needed, before they'd begin to train anybody, and the war was over before the survey was. Have 'em expect me to lose all my best men in the draft, and fuddle around to get priorities on materials, and spend all my profits on bonds, and pay big taxes, and then run a school for women — or men either — besides? That's too much of a good thing. No — I had to cut down the output. I was sorry, but what could you *do?* You can't make a toolmaker out of a coalheaver. It can't be done."

The salesman had cocked his head wisely. "Well, if I'd been in your place, I'd have trained women. I hear they do more work for less money. Over in England they —"

The florid gentleman made a sweeping gesture of contempt.

"England! Yes, of course they did. They *had* to. That's different. The war was *close* to 'em. And over in England they didn't have any deferred classification in the draft on the ground of dependents, either. Every man was called on to do one thing or the other. Work or fight. And if you worked instead of fighting, it was only *real* work that counted. Something that was needed for the nation. They said marriage was only an accident, and hadn't anything to do with war, so they took married men like you in the army, and paid his family compensation. Women had to go to work to fill those men's places. And here in America we had ten million able-bodied men, deferred for dependents,

in *non*-essential occupations. So when you say what *you'd* have done, and when you begin to quote England —"

The jewelry-salesman made a strategic retreat.

"Well, I wouldn't 'a cared much if I *had* been drafted. I bet I'd 'a got to be an officer sooner or later. Why, between you an' me, brother, I'd *enlisted* if Crowder hadn't shut down the bars on enlistments while the draft was goin' on."

"Very creditable idea," Palm Beach had nodded. "But as I recall it, the bars weren't ever put down on the Tank Corps, or Motor Transport, or —"

"I wanted the Infantry," Checks and Diamonds had inserted hastily. "And sweatin' inside them Tanks ain't what I call a popular indoor sport with *me*, brother. If I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die in the open air. I was in the Home Guard out our place, and say! brother, if that comp'ny of ours ever got drafted in a body, we'd 'a made them Marine Devil-Dogs look like a lot o' old women runnin' away from a garter snake. That's how much *I* was a draft-dodger, if anybody wants to know it!"

He had looked out from under his eyebrows at Egan, but Egan, snatching advantage of the momentary respite, was lost in retrospection and resolve.

"I gave a hundred to the National War Work crowd, too; not a lot, but —" He shrugged his shoulders, to express his full measure of devotion.

The florid gentleman was recessively amused. "I dare say you helped along the Red Cross, too."

"Yes, I gave to that, too," the salesman had confessed, fingering his cuff-links affectionately.

"And you invested pretty heavily in War Savings Stamps, most likely?"

"Did I!" The salesman had looked again at Egan, and resumed the inquisition. "Say, Major," said Checks and Diamonds brightly. "How do you fellers that's been Over There feel about the fellers that wasn't lucky enough to get acrost? Now you're back, I mean. My friend here —" at which the florid gentleman winced — "My friend here and I've been talkin' it over an' we kinder wonder if you fellers think a man that wasn't lucky enough to get acrost hasn't done nothin' to help win the war; or whether or not you feel as if we fellers over here was doin' our bit to help *you* fellers put it acrost, and doin' all we could when we stuck on our jobs, an' bought the bonds an' W. S. S. to *finance* the war, an' chipped in for the Red Cross an' the Jewish Relief Fund an' so on; or whether or not you fellers think we —"

At that juncture, Egan goaded beyond his ordinary indulgence had turned on him, and in his well-bred, slightly throaty voice, with the very smallest imaginable suggestion of remote Celtic ancestry in it, interrupted the oily flow of interrogation. "Why, those of us who were overseas — not that I have any right to act as spokesman; but this is my own private opinion — those of us who were overseas think exactly as you do over here. There was work to be done everywhere, sir. Different in kind, but equally important. And one can generally tell pretty accurately whether or not a man did his share of that work — by the character of his explanations, sir."

It was immediately subsequent to this reply that the

conversation had languished; and that Egan had enjoyed nearly half an hour of blessed peace.

The jewelry salesman now exhaled wearily, sniffed his independence, fondled his scarf-pin, and addressed the florid gentleman in the Palm Beach suit.

"Goin' to Cinci?"

"Plainfield."

Checks and Diamonds honoured Plainfield by a gracious inclination of the head.

"That's a nice little town, brother. Yours?"

"No; I've got some business connections there."

"That so? Who with?"

The florid gentleman, becoming more reserved as the inquiry became more personal, responded vaguely.

"Oh, I'm doing business with a lot of different people."

Egan sat up, and lighted his cigarette. His attitude was more unbending, his demeanour more suggestive of interest, than at any time since luncheon; his companions, however, remaining in mind of the joint slur he had put upon them, ignored him.

"Well, I make Plainfield myself every other trip. Yes, it's a nice little town. She's a grower, too. Lot o' changes there in the last three four years. I got a lot o' friends there, myself. I'm quite well acquainted there. Especially with the politicians. Good, solid, substantial men like Eddie Macklin, for instance . . ." He paused for effect. "You know Eddie Macklin?"

The florid gentleman waved his hand, perhaps to imply that a mere Macklin or two was hardly worth

accounting for, perhaps to ward away a draught of superheated air from the open window.

"I've met him."

"*I'm* an intimate friend of his." The florid gentleman's eyebrows went down a trifle at this. "I got a cousin's a big lawyer in Dayton knows him, an' I met him, through *him*. *My* home's Cleveland. Nice, bright feller, Macklin is. Straight like a string. You know he'll prob'ly be the next Mayor, don't you?"

"I'd heard it spoken of." The gentleman in the Palm Beach suit looked curiously at Egan, who had transferred his attention from the landscape to the conversation. "What's your cousin's name?"

"Kaplan. Sam Kaplan."

"So?" The florid gentleman wavered; yielded; burned his bridges. "I know Sam Kaplan pretty well myself. My own home's in Dayton."

The salesman's elbow served as punctuation for his philosophy.

"Is that *so?* By golly, it *is* a small world, when you come to think of it. Ain't it the truth? To think of you and me travellin' along here all this time without hardly sayin' a word to each other and both of us knowin' Sam, an' Eddie Macklin! Well, what d'you know about *that!* It certain'y is a small world, brother. How'd you ever happen to know Sam?"

"I beg your pardon." Egan had leaned out towards them, and was speaking equitably to the space halfway between his fellow-travellers. "But is that by any chance the same Eddie Macklin who used to be a clerk in Judge Perkins' office in Plainfield?"

The jewelry salesman surveyed him impudently. "Yeah. He's city counsel. They're gonna run him for Mayor."

Egan smiled faintly, and relapsed into his corner. "As you say, gentlemen, the town has changed . . ."

They looked uncomprehendingly at him for a moment. Then the florid gentleman began to smile. Checks and Diamonds hesitated with the annoyance of a slow-wit who detects a winged thrust without actually feeling it, and resumed his questioning.

"How'd you ever happen to know Sam, brother?"

"Why, as it happens," said the florid gentleman, "he's represented me once or twice in some small matters — that's all. He's not my regular attorney."

"Oh! And *your* name?"

"Henderson," said the florid gentleman, reluctantly. His manner made it evident to Egan that he didn't fraternize by choice with men of the jewelry salesman's importunities, but it was also evident that he was studying the salesman carefully. Egan, idly attentive, guessed that the florid gentleman was sufficiently anxious for Sam's support, or good opinion, to make it worth his while to appease the curiosity of Sam's obnoxious cousin.

"Not *Martin* Henderson!"

"Yes."

Egan stiffened. The salesman gulped, shot his cuffs, and twisted around so as to face the florid gentleman squarely.

"Well, wha'd' you know about *that!* So you're Henderson! Martin Henderson! Well, I'll be damned! By golly, I *will* be damned! You talk about

your small worlds! Why, man alive, it was *me*—" He rapped himself smartly on the chest, and repeated. "Man alive, it was *me* that carried the message to Garcia! Get me?"

"Message to . . ." Palm Beach was interested, but out of his depth.

The salesman glanced sidelong at Egan. He shot his cuffs once more—purple striped cuffs they were, and very decorative,— and bounced forward to the edge of his seat.

"Why, Mr. Henderson, I'm Charlie Feinberg. Didn't Sam tell you? No? Why, the old tightwad! Why, I'm the man brought him the news he passed on to you the same day — and took you to Plainfield on the 3.14 milk train that same night! I called it the message to Garcia like the story Albert Hibbard wrote up in a circular for free distribution to all the members in my lodge. I was the man on the job — get me? I was in Plainfield, and somebody wants me to do something, y'understand, an' I go do it. Get me? That was to Sam, an' then him an' you got together, an' that was all there was *to* it. By golly, I—"

The reaction of the florid gentleman was three-fold. He was taken by surprise, placed on guard, and made conciliatory, all at the same time. "Feinberg? No, Sam didn't tell me. I'm glad to meet you just the same. And I'm very much obliged to you . . ."

Checks and Diamonds laughed exuberantly, and caressed his scarf-pin in a tender passion of pride. "Well, I'm certain'y glad to meet *you*. . . . Oh! Vurry kind of you, I'm sure. That looks like a good, strong cigar. . . . Well, sir, I'm awful disappointed

the deal worked out the way it did, but you can't blame nobody for *that*."

The florid gentleman was beetle-browed. "No — no."

"I sh'd say *not*. Trust *me*, brother. Of course it might kind of startle you, if you didn't know I was mixed up in it, but you gotta remember I'm a friend of Eddie's and a cousin of Sam's. Strictly business. I carried the message to Garcia, for a favour, y'understand, and that's as far as it goes. . . . Much obliged for the cigar, Mr. Henderson." He snapped a generous section from the perfecto, and kindled it without removing the band. "And anything I can ever do for *you* —"

"Thank you, Mr. Feinberg; I'll bear it in mind."

Checks and Diamonds wriggled importantly.

"S'pose it would of made any difference if it *had* gone through?"

"It might. It might."

"Well, I guess the old man never knew what hit him, did he?"

"No. They said he died in his sleep. It was better that way, I suppose."

"That's right. What about his boy?"

"I imagine he's still in the army."

The salesman puffed appreciatively, and squinted at the band of the cigar. "Eddie told me about him. Said he used to be about as cocky as they grow. Thought he owned the whole earth and a fence around it. Some merry little surprise when he comes home, all right, all right." He laughed shrilly. "Well, 't's a great life if you don't weaken. Only I guess he'll

have to do some weakenin'. Not that I got anythin' against him pers'nally, but after what Eddie said, I guess it ought to do him good. The Egan Company's down an' out, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Henderson. "It certainly is."

"No, it isn't!" This was from the young officer by the window, and the swell of his voice was such that both the other men sat up, instinctively defensive. The young man was angry, and there was no mistaking it. He showed it, and he intended to show it. That firm jaw of his was pushed slightly outward, his blue eyes had little dancing points of light in them, and one of his big hands, resting on his knee, was doubled, automatically. "Listen here! I've let you people talk — I've given you all the rope you need — I haven't any idea who your friend Sam is, or what you mean by your message to Garcia, or any of the rest of your veiled secrets, and I don't want to know; but I've just waked up to the fact that you've mentioned my father, and my father's business, and myself. You —"

"Your father!" gasped the jewelry salesman, sinking into his chair, and sending the florid gentleman an ocular appeal for help.

"Oh!" said the big man, awkwardly. "Your father! Then you must be Bronson Egan, eh? That's rather embarrassing for all of us. I didn't recognize you — don't think I ever had the pleasure. Well, then you know who *I* am — Henderson of Dayton."

"I've heard of you." Aroused by the memory that his father had despised and distrusted Henderson more than any other man in the Middle West, he swung towards Feinberg. "And whoever *you* are, let me tell

you right here and right now I'm still quite cocky enough to resent the use of my own name, or my father's, the way you used them, in a public place by anybody of your calibre — or considerably bigger."

"Oh, come now, Egan —" began the florid gentleman, pacifically.

Egan, greatly to the relief of the salesman, who was sucking his cigar nervously, and watching, cat-eyed, for developments, pivoted towards Henderson.

"Well? Any comments?"

"Yes," said Henderson. "Calm down a little. You take offence too quick. Mr. Feinberg's repeated what some one said to him about you, and that's as far as it's gone. He didn't express his own opinion, did he? It's too bad, but after all, nobody's said anything that an apology won't cover." The salesman, picking up his cue, darted feverishly into the debate.

"Oh, I apologize — certain'y. I apologize. Hadn't any idea who you were, y'understand. I certain'y apologize."

Egan had discs of wrath in both his cheeks.

"And for your own special benefit, Mr. Henderson, I'll remind you that the Egan Company never had to take any back talk from anybody in your outfit, from yourself down — and it's too late to begin now. Furthermore, if you've got any personal remarks to make about either my father or myself, or about our business either, why, now's the time to make 'em!"

The florid gentleman, deducing from certain landmarks that his destination was near, stood up, swaying to the motion of the train. He looked down at Egan, and frowned; looked towards the salesman, and con-

tinued to frown. "He don't know it yet," he said to Feinberg; and then to Egan, kindly: "I'm awful sorry this happened, son. It only goes to show it ain't safe to talk anything but crops and Ford stories on a railroad train, or you step on somebody else's toes. I'd give a thousand dollars cash if this hadn't happened. But you're taking it too hard. You haven't been insulted. You —"

Egan was also on his feet, rigid.

"I want to know what you mean, then, by saying our company's 'down and out'? That's too old a trick of yours to get away with. Even if I passed over what you said about *me* — which I don't intend to." This last was for Feinberg, who shrivelled under it.

"He don't know it yet," said Henderson once more to the jewelry salesman, and again to Egan, most soothingly: "Youngster — I like you. I do; honest. Right off the bat. You're a born scrapper — just like your old man. You don't know when you're licked. If I had a boy myself, I hope he'd stand up for me the same way. Only this time you're on the wrong track. While you've been away, a lot of things have happened. If you don't know, why, I haven't got time to tell you now, and you wouldn't believe me anyway. It's no particular pleasure for *me* to be the one to spring it on you. Still, if you've got to have it now — why, the war's over, and the Egan Company went with it. I'm surprised Judge Perkins didn't let you know it. Oh, I know you won't believe me; you're too mad now to believe anything — but ask the first baggage-smasher you see at the Plainfield station when you get off the train. Ask anybody. It's public

information. Or, if you'll take my advice, you'll make for Judge Perkins' office the first thing and ask him."

Egan wavered, staring. His pupils were very wide. He spoke as though partly stunned.

"You . . . you're not trying to tell me it's failed! Nonsense, man, nonsense. Don't you suppose I'd have heard about it? I—"

"No, not simply failed." The big man stooped over the basin, and allowed cold water to trickle over his thick wrists; he held them up, dripping. "Not simply failed, Egan. I'm afraid it's dead. Permanently. Lord knows I wouldn't have picked out the job of telling you — and I'm mighty, mighty sorry this had to happen this way. But I ought to know, if anybody does. I took over some of its contracts myself, and I'm coming over to Plainfield now to bid on some of the machinery. . . . Don't think everybody that don't agree with you's a liar, Egan. It don't pay."

The Lieutenant inspected him critically, moved towards the doorway, paused, came back a step. "All right," said Egan dispassionately. "And while you're about it, you might get yourself out of the habit of spreading idiotic rumours about your competitors. That doesn't pay, either."

"Egan! Be reasonable. Would I have any sense to start any rumour *now* — ten minutes from the Plainfield station — and to you? I'm not trying to pick a quarrel with you. I'm trying to do the opposite."

"Well, you're not succeeding." He shot a glance at the leering salesman, who promptly froze. "As for you, Feinberg — just let me tell you one thing: I know your breed. Infantry! Bah! . . . you mean

Nursery! I'm sorry you're too small to lick. But I know just exactly what to expect from you, and I'm going to discount it. You'd better listen. . . . If I hear any of your joyous ribald laughter coming out of this compartment after I've gone, I'm coming back here and make you damn well regret it. Is that clear?"

"Why, Egan," said the florid gentleman, in disturbed protest. "I never knew your family had a reputation for beating up men under your size. He's apologized once. Calm down."

Egan, in the doorway, laughed very naturally, although his pupils were still dilated, with the astonishment and apprehension he was trying so diligently to conceal.

"I wouldn't fight him," he explained. "I'd spank him."

He went out; the salesman sat motionless for a moment, cackled suddenly, clamped his mouth tight shut. "By golly! D'you . . . d'you s'pose he *would* — the big bluff?"

"Don't worry — he'd love to," said Henderson dryly. "Lord, they were a fighting pair, those Egans. The Old Man as quiet as a mouse, and the boy as quiet as a cyclone. Sort of takes the electricity out of the room when he goes, doesn't it? And, say . . . I wouldn't make any funny faces at him out of the car window, either, if I were in your place; he'd come right through it to get at you. . . . Queer I hadn't recognized him. Never saw him before in my life, but when he told me who he was —"

The salesman drew a long breath.

"So that's the guy that everybody's sorry for, is

it?" He drew a still longer breath. "Well, *I* ain't. I'm glad of it! I'm glad of it! The great big stiff!"

"What I'm glad of," said Mr. Henderson, very seriously, "is that you didn't talk any more than you did. The best thing you can do — if you'll excuse my saying so — is to keep your mouth shut in public about that whole transaction. If you're a friend of Sam's and Eddie's — you will. You saw what it got you into, didn't you? Call it a cheap lesson. Forget it. Because, if the story ever leaks out, I'll know who to blame."

Here the salesman became almost telescopically small. "All right. All right, Mr. Henderson. I only thought seeing it was you —"

Henderson shook his head. "Forget it. Well: I'm getting off here — look me up some time when you're in Dayton."

The jewelry salesman presently moved to the vacant seat by the window, and waited, tense, until Egan appeared on the platform; waited then, growing tenser every moment, until Egan's broad back was turned, and Egan was fully twenty feet away, and through the gates.

"You great big stiff, you!" said Mr. Feinberg, articulating very clearly. "You great big bluff! You great big bum! Lowlife! You couldn't lick a postage stamp! I bet you bought them ribbons in a department store, you big piece of Limburger cheese!" He inhaled exultantly; honour was satisfied; he was avenged. "I'm glad of it," said Checks and Diamonds, referring oracularly to his recent dialogue with Palm Beach and perspiration. "Schwein-hund! I hope you choke!"

II

IT was on a sultry July night that Bronson Egan had quitted Plainfield, headed overseas, and it was on a sultry afternoon in mid-July, four years later, that he came back. At the first glance, the mere familiar appearance of the railroad station thrilled him and made him feel the warmth of homecoming; but an instant later, when he realized that there was no one to meet him, no one to cheer him, no one even among the taxi-drivers and baggage handlers who seemed to remember him (or whose faces he could himself remember), he felt his excitement slip away by degrees, and leave him only impatient to proceed.

As he hurried across the street, with Henderson's gloomy prophecy dispossessing him of his rightful joy to be at home again, he smiled diagonally at the contrasts in his own mind. Overseas, he had done so much more than he had ever expected to do, and the public reception was so infinitely less than he had visualized. There was no reception at all, there was no welcome at all; there wasn't even greeting. There wasn't even recognition. And it hurt him, because he lived on recognition. To be sure, he attracted long stares of notice from occasional passers-by, but it was notice of the uniform, and not of the man within it. His isolation of spirit made him feel like an alien, an expatriate. He had once been accustomed to say, and to believe, that he knew "everybody" in Plainfield. The absence of familiar faces was almost a blow at his pride.

As he increased his pace, he heard his name called excitedly, by a woman's voice. Stirred even by the unknown, he wheeled swiftly. At the nearest curb was parked a handsome touring-car, with an elderly woman and two attractive girls in the tonneau. Instantaneously, Egan's brain was wiped clean of the prophecy.

"Bronson!" The elderly woman in dark blue silk was leaning far out to him, offering both her hands and beaming with surprised pleasure; beyond her, the prettiest girl in Plainfield was aquiver with delight, and admiration. The third occupant, nearest to Egan, was a stranger.

"Mrs. Kent! And . . . and Mary!" His black leather suit-case was left standing on the edge of the sidewalk to impede pedestrians as it would; his overseas cap was flung to the seat by the chauffeur, who edged dignifiedly away from it.

"We knew you were coming, Bronson, but we didn't know when. I'm *so* glad we stopped here. How well you're looking! Isn't he, Mary?"

The daughter, wreathed in smiles, agreed with sufficient enthusiasm. "Splendid!" She couldn't keep her eyes from Egan's ribbon-bars, and he was deliciously self-conscious. The sight of her had given him back his sense of ownership of the world. "But I'd hardly know you. You've changed so."

Egan laughed explosively. "So've you. So's Plainfield. So's everything!" He brought himself back to the routine of the conventions. "Mr. Kent's well, I hope."

"The colonel's due tomorrow, Bronson," said Mrs. Kent with matronly satisfaction. "Yes, we've a sol-

dier in our family, too. He was a lieutenant-colonel first, and then they promoted him to colonel. He's been in the Quartermaster Corps in Washington."

"Really! You must be awfully proud of him." Egan said this with much sincerity, but he wasn't looking at Mrs. Kent as he said it.

"Well — confidentially, I am. . . ." She turned to the pretty stranger. "Martha, I want you to meet Lieutenant Egan — you've heard so much about him —" The stranger and Egan bowed in unison. "He's one of our dearest and oldest friends. Where are you going, Bronson? Can't we take you somewhere?"

"No, thanks. I'm only going up to Judge Perkins' office." The stranger's face absorbed him; he felt sure that he had met her somewhere, but his mental processes refused to set a time or place. And Mrs. Kent had committed that common and stultifying error of neglecting to mention the stranger's name.

"Oh. Well — you're coming to see us soon, aren't you? *Very* soon?"

Egan glanced at the daughter, and took pleasure in the discovery that her cheeks were delicately flushed, and her eyes expressive. She moved her head ever so slightly up and down; and then, as she quickly avoided his gaze, flushed more deeply yet. Egan drew a long breath.

"Very soon indeed," he promised, reaching for his cap. "It's good to see you again — it's making me homesick. Overseas, I didn't have time for it."

"Mother —"

"Yes, dear."

"Tonight?"

The older woman was gently vibrated from her poise. Her eyebrows fluttered with a premonitory message of caution. In the meantime, Egan had noted that the stranger bore a marked resemblance to Mary, so that he put her down as a distant relative, and stopped taxing his mind about her.

"Why, I didn't quite suppose. . . ." She halted, nonplussed; and finally put her exquisitely gloved hand over Egan's, as it rested on the tonneau door. "To tell the truth, we're having a little dance at the house tonight, Bronson. I didn't quite know whether to ask you up or not, but as long as Mary. . . . We'd love to have you, of course, but if it's too soon —" She was prepared to interpret the faintest hint of his uncertainty.

"No," said Egan. "I'll be glad to come." He looked down at the cobblestones of the street. "You've noticed I'm not wearing any arm-band. I'm not parading it at all. I'm not doing anything very differently from what I would have, if he'd lived. That was something he always made a point of. He always used to say that if anything like that happened to him, he wanted me to go right on as usual, and just remember how much he'd have enjoyed looking on. You won't be offended if I don't dance, though? If I just come to see you and meet some of my old friends?"

The two Kents were palpably relieved.

"Do come, then — and do whatever you like."

Egan nodded, caught Mary's eye, and was fascinated. Her lips formed the unspoken word: "Early."

"Right-o," said Egan, with dual purpose. He

bowed to each of the trio; the touring-car slid forward; and Egan, lifted back to his normal plane of exaltation by the chance meeting, turned to pick up his suitcase.

He was a few seconds too late. A bibulous wayfarer, radiantly engrossed in things far, far above the common level of a down-town sidewalk, and on a higher plane of exaltation even than Egan, had stumbled, tripped, and snatching at vacancy, found vacancy filled solid with the bulk of Egan, and clung to him, just as he turned, as though he had been a friendly lamp-post.

"Ten thousan' years an' . . . *hic!* . . . twice ten thousan' years have fled," observed the bibulous one, carefully freeing one hand to settle his headgear. "An' . . . *hic* . . . whoever y'are, on my b-bended knees I thank you for k-keepin' the tryst at the appointed place this sacred moment to save me — breakin' my damn fool neck." He gestured courteously to the sky with his free hand, and continued to embrace Egan with the other arm.

Egan, endeavouring to disengage himself, saw with chagrin that the Kents' car was stalled in traffic only a few yards away, and that the three women were looking back at him. He was also painfully aware of the amusement of every one else within sight and hearing.

"Here! Behave yourself. This is a bone-dry state, man. You'll get in trouble. You're all right now — brace up!"

"What?" The man had put his heavy hands on Egan's shoulders, and was straining into his face, as Egan tried to avoid him. He was of middle age and excellent physique; he was well-dressed, and his features, for all their present weakness, had points of character.

"Who *are* you, ch-child of Fate? You look like Old Man Egan. You do, do you not? Yes, you do. Then who'n hell *are* you?" Into his vacant eyes shot a sudden gleam of recognition. Of joyous horror. "Why . . . why, it's *you*, boy! It's . . . it's Bronson Egan come back home again, or I'm a . . . I'm a. . . ." He made a desperate effort to stand erect, and partly succeeded. "Bronson!" he said thickly. "Oh, Bronson! Don't you know me, boy? Don't you remember me? No? Look a' me, Bronson. Do' know me? Why, it's . . . it's your Uncle Stanley — your Uncle Stanley Adams — an' I'm tight, Bronson . . . I'm tight!"

Over Egan there suddenly swept a flood of sunny memory. More than twelve good years ago. The beloved mentor of his childhood; one of his earliest demigods; the first to receive unsolicited the highest distinction that the boy Bronson could bestow — the honorary title of relationship.

"Uncle Stanley!" he gasped.

The man stepped warily closer, and linked arms with him. Half a block ahead, the three women were still watching.

"Oh, Bronson . . . never thought you'd see your Uncle Stanley tight! Want to cry. Not goin' to cry . . . no. Want to. Tight. Tight every aft'noon, Bronson. I like it. Le's go get a cup black coffee. Black. Blacker . . . *hic* . . . better. Do' want pale black . . . want dark black. Sober'n a judge then. Le's go. Hang on, Bronson, ol' boy — I'm tight!"

Egan, red-faced with shame and outraged reminiscence, hesitated only the briefest instant. From boyhood, he had cared not the snap of his fingers what was thought of him. He had followed his instincts, and his moods unswervingly; he had held himself the only true independent of all his fellows, totally contemptuous of criticism, or of example. And the man beside him, although undeniably tight, was nevertheless the beloved Uncle Stanley of those brighter years.

When he had left Plainfield, he had dreamed of returning as a great hero, to be met with the veneration of the populace. He had dreamed of the triumphant march he would make down Main Street, and of the crowds that would pause to stare at him because he was Bronson Egan.

Now he was making that march; and crowds were pausing to stare at him. He was making that march past the Kents' touring-car, still bound in traffic; making it past a score of citizens he recognized, each of whom seemed to pop out of ambush like a jack-in-the-box at this precise moment; making it for six long squares down Main Street to the nearest Child's restaurant, with his suit-case in one hand, and the stumbling idol of his boyhood clinging fast to his other arm, for all of Plainfield to see, and to remember. The crowds stared; not because it was Bronson Egan, but because it was a humorous or a shameful spectacle, depending on which way you looked at it. No one could possibly have seen anything sentimental in it. Every one had looked either disgusted or amused; every one except the strange girl who, from her seat beside the

Kents, had regarded Egan, as he passed, with something of the expression that Mary Kent had lately worn in gazing at his ribbon of the Croix de Guerre.

An hour afterwards, when he gave his name over a wicket to the severe young woman who, although yet unscathed, was afraid that some one was eventually going to flirt with her, he was told that Judge Perkins was closeted with an important client, and wouldn't be at liberty until half past five. Would the gentleman wait? The gentleman most decidedly would. So Bronson Egan sat himself down on a very hard bench by the wicket, and sitting there, permitted his thoughts to drift backwards over the events of this extraordinary afternoon, over the amazing statements of the florid gentleman in the smoking compartment, and over the pyramid of things, beginning at his birth, which had terminated in the apex of today, and brought him here.

His thoughts were chiefly about his father.

III

IN Plainfield, it had been commonly said that Old Man Egan had displayed uncontrolled emotion only twice in his life, and that on both occasions he had shed tears. It was a hard report to believe, if you looked him straight in the eyes, for Old Man Egan retained just enough of the outward characteristics of his grandparents to make you expect from him the same bubbling humour, the same fighting passions, the same unchecked sorrows,— in general, the same spontaneity of conduct — as those ancestors of his had enjoyed in distant Ballycastle, two full generations past and gone.

But all this reminiscence lay deep in Old Man Egan's blue eyes, and it never went further. No one in Plainfield had ever heard him laugh outright, or heard his voice lifted above the conversational pitch. There was a vague rumour that in his younger days, before he had settled down in Plainfield, he had been a roistering blade worthy to uphold the best of Celtic tradition in peace or quarrel, but this was wholly unconfirmed and, indeed, was whispered over the tea-cakes chiefly by widow-ladies, elderly spinsters, and large-hearted married women, by way of a contrast, and to provide the romance which no handsome widower is suffered to be without.

The first of these two guaranteed instances of Old Man Egan's emotion dated from a certain night when he had been a resident of Plainfield for perhaps three

weeks; and that was more than twenty years ago. A surgeon had appeared at the door of the waiting-room of the little city hospital, hesitated, analysed his man, and walked directly to Old Man Egan, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"My boy," he said (for Old Man Egan was hardly qualified as a legal voter then), "My boy, she's given you a son — and she may live an hour, possibly two hours — not more."

It was said that Old Man Egan's head had drawn down into his shoulders as though he had been black-jacked from behind.

"Does she know it, Doctor?" he had asked.

"No."

Old Man Egan's chest promised to burst, but his head was erect again, and his eyes, so the doctor related, were such that a common man couldn't bear to look into them.

"Then she *will* not," said Old Man Egan, and went in to her. She was both conscious and happy, piteously weak and gloriously unsuspecting. He cheered her, praised her, uplifted her, kept an invisible tie of faith and love and encouragement between them to the last minute, and a few minutes beyond. And then, after that, there was no one within earshot whose face didn't show a sympathy of pain for Old Man Egan, alone there on his knees, sobbing his heart out for the girl who had exchanged her life for Old Man Egan's son.

The second time was ten years later. Old Man Egan and his young friend Stanley Adams, of the city staff of the Plainfield *Times*, were sitting at dusk on the veranda of Egan's tiny house. Through the gate,

up the walk, up the steps strolled Bronson Egan, a nonchalant tatterdemalion, torn, bruised, discoloured, with a mouse over one eye and a thin trickle of blood from his lips. Not faltering, he came to his father's chair and stood there, like a prisoner awaiting sentence, but a prisoner who has waived extradition, and come to judgment of his own accord, with self-respect intact. Old Man Egan inspected him minutely, glanced at Adams, and relighted his cigar.

"Well?"

The boy stood on one foot. "Had a fight, dad," he said.

His father smoked reflectively. "Who with?"

"Eddie Macklin."

"What about?"

"Aw, dad!"

"What about, Bronson?"

"Well, he . . . he . . . he said Mary Kent's stuck-up."

The corners of Old Man Egan's mouth twitched at this reference to the daughter of G. Willoughby Kent, his chief competitor in the local field, and prime magnate of Plainfield.

"What's your own opinion on that point, son?"

The boy's feet shuffled, and his ears grew hot.

"Never mind," said Old Man Egan. "Who licked?"

"I did."

"Sure?"

"I knocked his head off," said Bronson, none too conservatively, "and he bawled, and ran home. Said he'd tell on me."

"Lick him fair, did you?"

"Well . . . after *he* bit, I had to. Didn't begin it, dad. Honest."

"Taste good, did he?"

"Naw!" The boy's toothless smile was expansive. "I didn't bite only twice, anyhow."

"Don't you ever bite again, whether the other boy does or not. The Lord gives us fists to fight with an' teeth to eat with. Don't mix the system. . . . Not afraid he'd lick you next time he catches you?"

Bronson patted his cut lip, threw out his chest, and smiled sweetly.

"I can lick any feller my size in this town," he remarked; and added, after a pause, "and maybe a little bit bigger."

Stanley Adams said afterwards that Old Man Egan had happy tears in his eyes and that his voice trembled with pride as he ordered his son to go upstairs and make himself fit to eat dinner with decent people.

"And what," asked Adams presently, "are you going to do with the boy, Jim?"

"How do you mean — do with him?"

The reporter had all the altruism of a bachelor.

"Why, simply this — so far you've been able to keep a house running for him to live in, and —"

"Not a house — a home," said Old Man Egan stiffly, and Adams nodded. Old Man Egan's quixotic persistence in maintaining his own establishment, when he could so easily have sent Bronson to the Sisters of St. Mary first, and to a good boarding school afterwards, was a matter of common discussion.

It wasn't so well known, however, that Old Man Egan did it because he had never ceased to think of his wife at least once every quarter hour of his life.

"Quite right — a home," said Stanley. "And you had a nurse for him, and now you seem to have a pretty fair housekeeper, but after all, Jim, he's been a young animal up to now. Don't shake your head — of course he has. I'm not calling him names. Children *are* animals. All that mattered was his health. Isn't that so?"

"Well, let's suppose it's so. I want to hear some of a bachelor's theories on raising a boy."

"Don't worry, Jim — you're going to. Why, I was simply wondering how long you think you can keep it up. He's growing up fast. Seems to me he'll be missing a lot of the influences he ought to have. If he's got the family traits, he's sensitive. He's impressionable. He's a fighter. He ought to have training that you can't give him — no man could. When he came in just now was a case in point. You'll make a wild man out of him. Now if you were to be married again —"

"No." Old Man Egan's tone was subdued, but it made Adams sense his own intrusion. "If I could take charge of a lad one hour old, Stanley, and bring him up to fight for a — a lady —" Egan grinned flittingly, "at the age of ten, beat his man, come home and tell me,— not lyin' about the little girl who he *does* think is stuck-up, but he likes her just the same and maybe better for it, because he's by way of bein' stuck-up himself — an' not neglectin' to tell about the bitin' part, which he knows is not fair — if I can have him come to me half expectin' to get trounced for fightin',

look me in the eye and tell his tale and wait for orders, get them and obey them — then, I can bring him up the rest of the way . . . maybe."

Adams conceded the possibility. "You've done wonders with him, Jim, no doubt about it. And built up a good business besides — Heaven knows how. But in the daytimes, when he's out of school and you're away . . . I'm just wondering whether you want him to grow up to be a loose end, or what. You can't be everything to him, you know. You'll make a he-man out of him, all right, but the best kind of man has to be sort of tempered before he's ready for the world. He'll get his ideals second-hand unless he gets them from the right kind of women. He —"

Old Man Egan interrupted. "Yesterday," he said mildly, "I bought the old Senator Servos house on Vine Street, furnished."

"You did?" Adams' brows gathered. "But what's that got to do with Bronson? And what on earth can you do with a small hotel like that?"

"Everything," said Old Man Egan. "I made ten thousand five hundred last year, I'll make twelve this. The house was on the market cheap, and I took subject to mortgage. It's a first-rate investment. Bronson and I are going up on Vine Street to live among the swells." Puzzled by his air of finality, Adams held his silence. "The boy'll learn all there is to be learned, Stanley. He'll have the best neighbours and go to the best schools. He'll have day school, and Sunday school, and dancin' school — all with women teachers. He's a bit of a hellion, so every woman mothers him a

bit." Old Man Egan seemed to see miles over the end of his cigar. "He'll have all the advantages that my money can buy, and I'll have all the money I can make without forgettin' that I'm a father. I intend to ask two or three of my friends to come live with us, so he'll hear sensible talk at his meals, an' get ideas that teachers haven't the time to find out about. Politics, business, life. When I'm done with the house, I've got a better use for it than it's ever seen yet, and in the meantime it'll do what I want it to. When he's, say, twenty-five, out of college, with three or four years' experience, I take him in as a partner." Old Man Egan leaned forward to tap Stanley's knee. "And as my partner, Stanley," he said, "he'll have a half interest in what'll be a quarter of a million dollar business by that time, if I live and keep my health."

"Um," said Adams. "You're confident."

Old Man Egan was imperturbable.

"Confident? Sure I'm confident! Give a man something to work for, Stanley! I churn myself ten miles before breakfast every morning on a bicycle — 'there goes that crank Egan again!' Crank? Why, Stanley, my health is his future! Eat right, go to bed early, drink seldom — 'Old Man Egan's a faddist!' No, but Old Man Egan's got something to work for. A good loser? No. A good trader? Not by a damn' sight! A good loser hasn't any kick in him, and a good trader generally lands before a referee in bankruptcy. I'm hard to do business with, Stanley — harder than nails. Fair and square, the best I know how, but a cold proposition on a new scheme, and bad pickin' for shoe-

string artists." He grimaced. "Fact is, I'm the worst gambler in Plainfield, Stanley, only nobody knows it."

"Don't make me laugh! Gambler! Next thing you'll call yourself a souse!"

Old Man Egan made a gesture of confirmation.

"By instinct, Stanley — and by practice until I was married. I'd rather gamble than eat. Poker, stock market, Board of Trade, business — anything. Love it, Stanley. But it's *his* money. It's his future. I haven't risked a nickel on a gamble since Ninety-Four. I wouldn't so much as match you for carfares; I might lose. I don't take chances any more. I'm tellin' you this so you can see the point. So I guess I won't take many chances on the other things — education and morals and society, and all that. I'll take no chances on Bronson. The boy'll make me proud of him."

"Or . . . ?"

"There isn't any 'or.'" He tossed the stump of his cigar over the railing. "I will brag about only one thing on this earth, Stanley, and that one thing is that when an Egan makes a promise, even to himself, he keeps it. I promise you the boy'll be a good man, a strong man, and a credit to the mother he never saw — and I wish I could promise two per cent as much for you. Come on in to dinner."

To the big, rambling house on Vine Street, Old Man Egan took his young son Bronson to live among the swells; and measured by the gauge of Plainfield and the era, it was a move to an impregnable position. The house itself was comfortable and hideous: a slate-

roofed, raw-bricked structure of unexpected twists and turns and architectural improprieties which, on the outside, sadly offended the modern eye, but on the inside, gave deep respite to the modern body.

It took Bronson Egan, even under the spur of novelty, two days of constant exploration to familiarize himself with the four-acre estate; after that, he was thoroughly acclimated. The abrupt improvement in his scale of living never seemed to register on his consciousness; he simply took for granted the broad lawn with its twin stags at bay (and rode them bareback at the top of his lungs); he accepted without a tremor the prim old barns and stables, with their empty bins and stalls and all their manifold possibilities for pirates' lairs, and club headquarters, and gymnasiums, and general sanctuary from pursuit; he was no less even-pulsed, although pleased, when horses and a saddle-pony came to live in those echoing stalls; he wasn't for a moment awed to dwell in an ex-Senator's mansion with seventeen rooms and two baths, one of them almost new.

On the ground floor, leading out of a square little hallway, there was a reception room in unspeakably fragile gilt, with many gold-framed paintings ("hand done," the real-estate agent had taken his solemn oath) in ebony shadow-boxes, and a gilded statue of Venus, very nearly life-size, with a clock so placed as apparently to record the amount of her appetite. This apartment had the power to offend Bronson merely by its atmosphere of unreality; he shied from it, as he had been taught to shy from too-brightly coloured candy. It didn't digest well. On the opposite side of the hall

there was a drawing-room, much larger and more heavily equipped; a room which somehow gave Bronson a feeling of supreme arrogance as he stood in the centre of it and slowly wheeled to all points of the compass. Here was a grand piano in solid mahogany, and a grandfather's clock in solid mahogany, and a grand series of chairs and tables in the very solidest of solid mahogany; five standing electroliers with mahogany columns and parti-coloured shades, countless gold-framed engravings suspended from the picture moulding by gold and blue ropes, rosetted at the top and adorned with heavy tassels halfway down; seven jardinières, mainly blue, disposed in corners; and, above all, the most wondrous of carpets, thick and noiseless, an almost perfect boy-silencer. Further on, there was the library, a huge, dusky room with practically all of the Senator's books still resident; two gigantic baize-covered desks, and a magnificently cushioned window seat where Bronson might repose at leisure and strain his eyes to read in the faint light struggling through the diamond panes of stained glass above his head. Later on, this was to be the council chamber of the local chapter of the St. Nicholas League — the camouflaged title of Bronson's penny-matching association and offensive-and-defensive neighbourhood alliance. There was also a commodious cellarette built into the wall; and if the Senator had kept it filled with a stock as innocent as Bronson's — the rolling stock of the Plainfield Mechanical Railroad Company — the house might not have passed out of the Senator's possession, nor the Plainfield Sanitarium acquired its most distinguished patient.

On the second floor, reached by a broad staircase with a sort of ecclesiastical window at the half-way junction, were the bedrooms which gave to Bronson his enduring sense of the majesty of sleep. His own was nearly twenty feet square — plenty of room to swing a cat in, as Old Man Egan said, and plenty of room to practise swinging a baseball bat in, which Bronson often did. From the narrow, darkened hallway, a row of massive doors gave upon unused room after unused room; people touched their temples suggestively when they spoke of Old Man Egan's folly in buying this unnecessarily large house, and wondered what on earth he could do with ten bedrooms for a family composed of himself, his son, and his Scotch housekeeper.

Old Man Egan showed them. In accordance with his preconceived idea, he invited to live with him Stanley Adams of the *Times*, who would converse occasionally with Bronson on topics of the day, and sharpen his worldly wits. He compelled the Honourable George Perkins, his lawyer and his closest friend, to renounce his cosy boarding house, and to live in the ancient grandeur of Room Number Four. This was in hope that Bronson would absorb much of dignity and worth from Perkins.

Perkins and Adams paid to Old Man Egan regularly weekly the same as they had paid for their last previous board and lodging. "So that anybody," said Old Man Egan, "can curse at the victuals, complain of the beds, or quit without notice, an' nobody's beholden to anybody."

The other four bedchambers (excluding Old Man Egan's cubicle and the room which the housekeeper oc-

cupied) were kept fresh in linen for transient guests. At the mere conception of Old Man Egan as an entertainer, Plainfield had politely snickered; but Old Man Egan, emerging from his long retirement, proved to be a very competent entertainer indeed, although a sedate one, and eventually it was understood that few visitors of intellect, of commercial importance, of experience in travel or in the arts and sciences, had any very pronounced chance of getting away from Plainfield without at least an invitation from Old Man Egan. Still more to be marvelled at, a large proportion of these distinguished visitors seemed to take a fancy to Egan; many of them came a second time, and repeatedly; many remained at the Vine Street house throughout their entire local stay; and Bronson listened to them, and whether fascinated or bored, allowed the germs of ambition to percolate into his brain. It was at about this time that Old Man Egan joined the Metropolitan Club, and those who were most amazed at his desire to become a member were still more amazed when, after paying his initiation fee and dues, he never availed himself of the club's privileges.

"Humph!" said Old Man Egan to Adams. "Have they no remembrance of the Constitution and By-Laws? Sons of members are *ipso-facto* junior members at eighteen and full-fledged members at twenty-one. And it's the best club in Plainfield — although I don't care much for clubs, myself. But young men seem to like them."

When Bronson was twelve, Stanley Adams went away to New York to join the staff of what he called a "real newspaper," and Bronson was disconsolate, for Adams

had been a trusted and an understanding friend and companion. After he had gone, Bronson, carrying the journalist's parting gift, a coveted .22 Winchester repeater, sought his father.

"Dad," he said, "what made Uncle Stanley's breath smell so funny when he said good-bye?"

Old Man Egan, a teetotaller against his inclination for thirteen years, looked down at him with tenderness in his eyes, but none in his voice.

"The wrath of God," said Old Man Egan enigmatically. "In the form of liquor. Don't you forget your Uncle Stanley, Bronson — he'll be your best friend and his own worst. You'll forget what I'm telling you — Here! Stop that! Don't ever point a gun at anybody whether it's loaded or not — but I'll be satisfied if you don't forget your Uncle Stanley. He'll either be a tramp or a great editor, Bronson, before he's forty; and in either case, he'll be your best friend and his own worst."

Bronson went by a circuitous route to a neighbouring curate; not that he needed a verification of his father's definition, but because he felt that this was a matter requiring the co-operation of the cloth.

"Mr. Simpkins," he asked, "what does the wrath of God smell like?"

The curate was verging towards Unitarianism, and didn't understand small boys.

"Sulphur matches," he responded flippantly, thinking of his Puritan forebears.

"You're a big liar," said Bronson, with awful distinctness. "It's booze."

It took the good offices of Uncle George Perkins to

settle the resultant tumult; and to bring out the fact that when Bronson had to decide between his father and a clergyman, the cleric naturally suffered by comparison. On Perkins' recommendation, made in view of the boy's earnestness, Bronson wasn't punished, except by ultimatum and temporary deprivation of his rifle. But the curate prophesied frankly that Bronson would end in a reformatory; and when he shortly accepted a call to Dayton, Old Man Egan didn't ask Bronson to be sure to remember him.

From that point forward, two men and a housekeeper brought up Bronson. He wasn't lonely, for his mental resources were always amply sufficient. He made friends easily, and as soon as he had made them, he led them. At fifteen he was acknowledged cock-of-the-walk in his own bailiwick: the handsomest, hardest-hitting, best dancing youth of the best neighbourhood in Plainfield and most of the others; and he knew it. There was no barrier to his confidence; there was no achievement which he would confess to be beyond his powers. He got what he wanted when he wanted it.

Old Man Egan watched him intently, and approved; and the Honourable George Perkins watched him and wasn't sure that Stanley Adams hadn't been right in prescribing a second marriage for Old Man Egan. Watched Bronson plough grandly ahead to the captaincy of school teams, the presidency of school organizations. Saw his name in the city papers — first as a star left-tackle, later as a frequent guest at those junior affairs worth chronicling socially. Watched him become, quite naturally and normally, that specimen of his age known as a lady-killer; and devote too

much time to his clothes and his haberdashery. Watched him slip unerringly into the social life of Plainfield — and because Plainfield was a manufacturing city, there were no finely drawn distinctions of class; there was society, and there were the working people. Bronson was in society; and thinking vaguely of wider fields to conquer — New York, for example, where Uncle Stanley Adams was one of the elect, writing signed articles for a great newspaper every day, and sending a letter every three months to Old Man Egan to explain how easy it was to break into the metropolis if you knew how. His letters fretted Bronson and made him restless.

In the meantime, the paternal shop had prospered; Old Man Egan was manufacturing first-grade machine tools, and had presently organized a corporation paying twenty per cent. Offered bank and other directorships, he shook his head.

"I've got a single-track mind," said Old Man Egan, "with two trains on it now. Thanks for the compliment, but I can't see my way clear . . ." He also held tightly to nine-tenths of the capital stock, no matter what outsiders bid for it. This, too, was to insure Bronson's future.

Bronson enjoyed all the expensive juvenile luxuries of the period; and Old Man Egan, who a few years ago had sat on the library floor with him to teach him the fundamentals of railroading by use of his elaborate mechanical railway, now taught him how to care for his motor-cycle as an introduction to elementary engineering. Uncle George Perkins scowled occasionally, and muttered that Bronson was being given too much,

taught too much, and allowed to make too few mistakes.

At eighteen, when Bronson went to college, he was the most envied boy in Plainfield. He was affable, keen as a razor, straightforward, tremendously proud of his father and of himself, and vastly too well done. Old Man Egan had overtrained him, but Old Man Egan never suspected it — never suspected that the bulk of Bronson's honours were conferred reluctantly, and not because Bronson was popular, but because he was so accomplished and so aggressive that he simply couldn't be overlooked. Never suspected that the majority of the girls who adored him were arrant little hero-worshippers, glorifying the husk of the hero and belittling the kernel.

Bronson took with him to college a check for a thousand dollars, four trunks, a slithering red roadster, and the photographs of eleven pretty girls. (Those of seven girls not quite so pretty he left, with wickedness aforethought, on the mantel in Uncle George Perkins' room.)

"Now, boy," said Old Man Egan at the station, "I'll not go further with you. You're man grown; I've made of you all I can; the rest is yours. I'll give you no old woman's advice, neither. All I have to say to you is — be honest, and be clean — and one virtue or the other will carry you through all but one trouble in a hundred. If the hundredth trouble ever comes — telegraph collect."

The college looked upon Bronson, and found him promising to look at. Higher education was rapidly forced upon him, and he was abnormally quick to learn.

The trouble was that on account of Old Man Egan's care and foresight, he had too little to learn for his own benefit. He was a born student, a born athlete, a born flirt, and Old Man Egan had over-developed him, omitting only the final philosophy, the final factor of safety, which Bronson should have understood long since — that he never need be on guard against his equals, but against his inferiors, for they were large in numbers, and more envious than schoolboys know how to be.

Again, the honours came to him with hardly an effort. He was the first junior ever to be elected football captain. He spent more money than any man in his class; won more pewter trophies; demoralized more policemen; and caused the hearts of more girls to flutter dangerously when he came by. According to undergraduate standards, he accomplished much, but he still refused to recognize that there was any limit to what he might accomplish. When the Senior Class voted him its opinion that of all its members he was the most likely to succeed, he took it as a matter of just due. He thought so himself. His conceit was less offensive than it might have been; but even so, success had affected him more than Old Man Egan was able to perceive.

When Bronson graduated and came home, society was his to command, and right royally he commanded it for a fortnight. His clothes were copied by the younger set, his mannerisms duplicated. To have had a single dance with him was a sort of official approval upon the social pretensions of any Plainfield girl; to have had two in an evening was equivalent to an Order of Merit; to have had more than three — but only Mary Kent

attained that dizzy eminence, and it was considered tantamount to an engagement.

"And now," said Old Man Egan, "you'll put in three years studyin' management, and after that, you'll be an equal stockholder with me in an enterprise worth four hundred thousand dollars, what with foreign war orders and all. Kent and I've rigged up a working agreement that'll keep this man Henderson quiet for a while — maybe Kent and I'll consolidate sometime, and if we do, you'll have a gold mine. Kent's only got a daughter."

Bronson's eyes wavered.

"I can't, dad," he said.

"Why not?" asked Old Man Egan, without excitement.

"Well — the war —"

"War? It won't last another six months."

"It's lasted ten months now, dad. It'll go another year, *I* think. They want men to drive ambulances on the French front — men who can look after their own cars. That's what I heard — a friend of mine wrote me to come across. If you don't mind, I'd rather go over —"

"For the fun of it, Bronson, or to help?"

"To . . . For the fun of it, dad. And to help, too. Why, with the practice I've had in running things, I'm just the kind of man they want."

Old Man Egan sighed.

"I can't blame you."

"Well?"

Old Man Egan closed his eyes for a moment.

"I'll have to ask Perkins. It's too much for me, Bronson. It's a question of justice. What's best,

and what's right, for both of us. I can decide things for me, and I can decide things for you, but when it comes to a matter between you and me, we'll ask George Perkins."

The old lawyer, when consulted, had his answer all ready.

"Let the boy go, Jim," he said. "I've been wanting to tell you something like this for the last five years. It'll knock some of the damned conceit out of him, and he needs it more than anybody else I ever knew. And that's all he *does* need to make him human."

So the boy went, but Old Man Egan never spoke to Perkins again, except to say "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" to him on the street, as long as he lived.

IV

NOW presently, when the Honourable George Perkins had exhausted all the known formulas of welcome, and the hard duties of his office had come home to him, he leaned far back in his creaking swivel-chair, and making a right angle with the extended and joined fingers of his two bony hands, looked over the top of Bronson Egan's head and out of a window badly in need of washing. He was a grizzled campaigner of the law, bushy browed over clear gray eyes; he stood six feet two without a stoop, and with authority lurking in every inch of him. His dress was proof that his pride in his profession didn't extend to his person, and in sixty-five years he hadn't even cared to learn how to make a neat bow out of his Democratic black string tie. But his knowledge of men was even greater than his knowledge of the statutes, and no legislature could have repealed more than a trivial fraction of what he knew.

The duty which lay before him was peculiarly unpleasant, but the Judge wasn't temporizing on that account. He was merely revolving in his mind the various methods of presenting the narrative, in order to spare Egan the greatest shock. As he considered, and his thoughts inevitably ran backwards, he found himself analysing Bronson, and estimating that the war had improved him by at least a thousand per cent, and stopped another thousand per cent too short.

"If anything's gone wrong, and you're trying to

make it easy for me, Judge — don't bother. I've heard some rumours, anyhow. On the train. Is the Company having trouble? Why didn't you cable me?"

"Hm!" The old man started guiltily. "What makes you think I'm trying to let you down easy?"

"You look it, that's all. Well, go ahead. I'm not a hog. Have we lost some money? I thought from the papers everything in the country was booming. But if anything's gone sour, I want to know it. I've got to know where I stand."

The Judge found it difficult, just then, to look at him. "I hate to tell you so, but it looks pretty bad, Bronson, pretty bad. I didn't cable you because you couldn't have done anything about it . . . and until March there was a chance of getting out of it whole some way or other; and until a month or so ago there was a chance of saving *something*. I'm the executor, Bronson — you couldn't have helped a mite. And it's so involved, I couldn't have sent you even the gist of it by cable, not unless I spent a couple of thousand dollars. So when you wired me you'd landed, I just told you to come on as quick as you could. I've done my best for you, son."

Egan's apprehensions redoubled. "What *is* it? If it's as bad as you're making it out to be . . . Please hurry up and tell me, Uncle George." He was harried by the thought of failure, but consoled by the thought of the comfortable residue which surely would fall to him. And a small income without any obligation to work for it might prove even more enjoyable than a large income with the need of sweltering under the obligation, and going to the office six days a week.

"Of course . . . Sure you won't smoke? I'll have a pipe, then." He continued to talk as he filled a very unfashionable corncob with still more unfashionable tobacco. "I don't know how much you know about the fracas your father and I had when you went away. It was too bad. He asked me what I thought about letting you go. It nearly broke his heart to have you; he wanted you to stay in the business. And he thought you ought to, after all he'd done for you; he'd set his heart on having you with him; but he wouldn't say so to you, because he didn't want to spoil your fun. He asked me, and I told him he'd been blind. He'd brought you up to be a boy with more possibilities than any one else in this town, and with a bigger swelled head. Not that you hadn't earned it; but you had it. I told him to let you go, because it might take some of the conceit out of you, and I guess it has."

"Yes," said Bronson. "I guess it has."

The Judge bent over to minister to his all-wool socks.

"So we had a fracas, and I came down town again to live, and . . . I might as well make a clean breast of it, Bronson . . . we didn't see very much of each other after that. And then last fall . . ." The Judge coughed heavily. "He made me sole executor. He dictated me a little note the day before he died. He'd asked to see me, but they wouldn't let him. Told me he couldn't forgive me, not for thinking what I did, but for admitting it. Said he knew it was my honest opinion, and —" The Judge coughed again. "Oh, hang it all, Bronson, he said he knew, no matter what had gone between us, I'd take care of your interests as

if they were my own. I appreciated that — I certainly did."

"Why, Uncle George. Why, . . . why, *I* didn't know you'd separated," said Bronson, bewildered. "He never wrote me a word about it."

The Judge verified it with a solemn gesture.

"I imagine he didn't tell you because he always hoped we'd patch it up somehow . . . We would have, too; if you'd come home sooner. I was ready any time, but you know what your father was like when he once got an idea in his head. Well . . . as far as the will was concerned, I guess I gave you a good synopsis of it in my letters last fall. The Vine Street house went to the City Hospital,— Heaven only knows why; they can't use it very well; they'll have to hold it as an investment; I hear they've rented it to somebody — and all his cash and securities (there wasn't much cash; it was mostly bonds) went to the county orphanage; and he left you all his stock in the Egan Company. On the books, the company was worth a good deal over a million dollars, Bronson. They'd had smashing big business in war orders, and all the experts said business would be bigger than ever after the war. And your dad held the control."

The Judge paused to wipe his spectacles, and to replace them on his forehead. Egan was electrified, but his tone was important enough to convey his thought that he was still a large beneficiary.

"You say 'on the books' as though you meant — Has it depreciated a lot? Down to what, Uncle George?"

"Wait a minute. . . . Along about February last

year, Bronson, money got pretty tight. The Old Man wanted money and went to the banks. Never needed 'em before; the business had financed itself. But now he had to expand in a hurry, and he had to have cash. And a long time ago the banks wanted your father to play in with 'em, and he wouldn't. So when he wanted favours from 'em, in times like those, they sort of held him up . . . I don't mean they took any mean advantage of him, but they held him pretty close to terms. Collateral agreement. He didn't like it, but you know what your father was — if he thought they expected him to kick at it, he'd agree with 'em just as nice and smooth as you please, and try to make 'em feel ashamed of themselves. First off, he borrowed a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and he put up as collateral a hundred and fifty thousand of Egan stock. No sense in it, of course, considering the market value, but he did it to show 'em he could snap his fingers at 'em. Paid his note when it was due, and borrowed more. Left the stock as collateral again. You see, the business was growing awful fast; what it really needed was more capital, but the Old Man wouldn't let anybody else in; wouldn't consider it. They said Kent once offered him $600 a share for a thousand shares, but he laughed at it. And then all of a sudden the influenza got him, and it turned into pneumonia. Your dad was sick a long time, Bronson. A man that hadn't taken care of himself wouldn't have lasted half so long. There was one of those notes due, and it wasn't paid. It wasn't paid, and it *wasn't* paid. And the Old Man never carried a personal balance to speak of, anyhow.

And since our fracas, he hadn't had any other lawyer to look after his personal matters. Just took that chance. So finally — while the Old Man was still too sick to know what was going on — the bank took the bull by the horns, and sold the collateral."

Egan's eyes were blinking, and his lips were curved in a faint, mirthless smile. Much of the importance had slipped away from him. Much of the maturity was ironed away from his features. His eyes were as round and translucent as a child's.

"The bank sold the collateral, did it?" he echoed, with curious emphasis. It was plain that he considered himself the victim of vast injustice. "A hundred and fifty thousand par value?" His jaw relaxed significantly. "Why — that lost the control. . . . What bank was it?"

"Kent's bank. Citizens Trust."

Egan's throat was dusty.

"Kent's bank? *Kent's* bank! Why, I thought he and my father were friends! H'm! And who bought the stock? Do you know?" He was elaborately calm, as befitted a young man bushwhacked, but with power enough still left to right his own wrongs.

Judge Perkins cleared his throat. "Eddie Macklin."

"*No!*"

"Sit down, Bronson — Yes, Macklin bought it. You can't blame him for grabbing at what looked like a good bargain, can you?"

Egan, after a dynamic turn around the room, sat down. His emotions were working on his brain alone;

his muscles were apparently immune. The hot spot at the base of his brain, however, was driving him towards incoherence.

"And you let that little skunk — you let *any*body get away from my father what he'd slaved a lifetime to get? What was *mine?* What does that mean, Uncle George? Does it mean I've *lost* that much? More'n half the whole stock? Does it? I'll see Kent myself. Why didn't Kent look out for him in the first place? Why didn't some of his other friends protect him? Why didn't *you* protect him? By gosh, if I've got any influence left in this town —"

"Softly, boy, softly! Shouting won't get it back for us. I was in hospital with the influenza for two months myself, Bronson. Kent was in Washington. And friends didn't count for much just then — it was devil take the hindmost. If I'd been out, I could have fixed it up overnight. Or if he hadn't been so close-mouthed, he'd have had somebody who'd have acted for him. He had a whole raft of bonds right in the Citizens Trust vaults. But I wasn't, and nobody else did a thing, and he was so sick he couldn't so much as hold a pen to sign a power of attorney."

"I see." Egan was suddenly very dignified; and the Judge, realizing that the pose was designed to conceal a terrible disappointment, continued to gaze out of the window. "So to pay a hundred thousand dollar note for the company, my father had to lose three-fifths of all its stock — a controlling interest, and worth, as you've just said yourself, over half a million dollars proportionately — for just how much?"

The Honourable George hesitated, and finally looked at Egan.

"It brought a hundred and seventy-five thousand, Bronson."

There was an interval of several seconds before Egan could grasp the fact. He was baffled and dazed by the unexpected answer. His expression was now of helpless incredulity. He was as shaken as anybody of his age should properly have been before such a thunderbolt.

"H-how could it go as low as that, Uncle George? When you just *said* . . . I'm all twisted up. I — It's an outrage — it's robbery! I don't understand that at all!" His bravado faded into the weakness of ignorance, and despair.

The Judge put down his pipe.

"I don't know. I wasn't around at the time. But after I got out of hospital I heard that there wasn't much bidding. In the meantime, there'd been a lot of gossip that the company was getting in bad shape, and —"

"The Egan Company in bad shape!" pleaded Egan. "Why, you've just *said* —"

"You're not listening. I said in the meantime, there'd been a lot of gossip that the affairs of the company were in bad shape. They were good, strong ones, too. There was talk about labour troubles, and bigger taxes and cancellations of contracts, and all sorts of things; and this was just when business was all demoralized. And it was a one-man concern, and your dad wasn't expected to live. And money was scarce.

And the *Times* had printed a story about reconstruction that didn't give us any the best of it."

Egan passed a hand wearily over his forehead. His shoulders had drooped perceptibly.

"We've got to do something about this, Uncle George. We've got to get busy quick. It couldn't have been Eddie Macklin's own money, could it?"

"Oh, no. That is, not all of it. He gave it out that twenty-five of it was his own, and the balance was trust funds. He's trustee for two or three pretty good-sized estates; on the side."

Egan was struggling against the tide of realities.

"Well, even that price, less the face of the note and interest and costs, must have left a balance of sixty or seventy thousand in the company's favour, didn't it? Where's that? Isn't that mine, anyway?"

"Not in the company's favour, Bronson; in your dad's. It was his stock personally. He borrowed the money personally. The balance went to the estate; and the cash part of his estate goes to the orphanage. He made the note and put up the collateral before he made his will."

Egan shivered. No importance clung to him.

"Who was running the business when Dad was sick? Garrity?"

"Yes."

"Hasn't he made some explanation of how he let that infernal thing happen to us? Hasn't he said *anything*?"

"Not that I know of. It was your dad's personal affair, anyhow. It was even his personal note. That was the way he ran the business. Never like a cor-

poration at all. I always used to tell him a man who ran a corporation like a personal enterprise didn't deserve the privilege of incorporation, but he wouldn't listen to me." The old lawyer wiped his spectacles once more, and replaced them firmly on his forehead. "Bronson, in twenty-six years your dad never had a strike. But a couple of days after he died, the directors had a special meeting and elected Garrity president to fill the unexpired term. He's been superintendent for a good many years; and it looked all right. Then inside of a week, the men went out in a body."

Egan was repeatedly wetting his lips.

"What for?"

"More money. It seems that Garrity wanted to fight, and the directors backed him up. The strike lasted a week."

"I see. Who were the directors, Uncle George? The same seven?"

"No. I got out four years ago. Why, you and Kent — and you were both away; Garrity himself; Macklin — he was elected to replace your dad; Johansen, Richards and Garverick."

"Eddie? How'd he get on the board?"

"Eddie bought that stock. The old directors had a right to fill vacancies from the stockholders, and they did. Eddie and Garrity."

"All right — go on, please, Uncle George." Egan was almost physically sick.

"Well, the men came back, but there wasn't a good friendly feeling. Things were nervous. On edge all the time. Garrity was an autocrat. And right off, the men began to quit one by one, and look for other

jobs — some went to Kent's, some to Henderson's in Dayton, and the rest just drifted — you know how they do. Bye-and-bye there were only two toolmakers left; there were six turret lathe operators; there were four milling machine hands. There just weren't any more to be had. So Egan's was getting ready to close down, when all of a sudden the deliveries of steel stopped; and every workman in the plant just naturally looked for another job. You can't blame 'em, Bronson. You can't expect a skilled man to sit around and do nothing, whether he's paid or not. Garrity closed down the plant when he had to."

"I'm not blaming him yet," said Egan apathetically.

"That's right; let's be judicial. Well, the plant closed down on November 9, and on November 11 we got the news of the armistice. From that day, the Government was interested in stopping production; not boosting it. And —"

"Wasn't there anything but Government business?"

"There was a lot of reservations, Bronson, but no men and no steel. Henderson put up a big roar about being ready for peace-time production; Kent's factory was all ready; The Egan Company was paralysed. And then on the ninth of December, just a month later, the city killed the lease." He chewed his lips reflectively. "The city's leased your dad eight acres for ninety-nine years at a dollar a year. That was when you were a baby — when Plainfield was crazy to get manufacturers here. There was a provision that the plant had to be in operation continuously. All those old municipal leases ran that way, so's money would keep circulating in the community. Thirty consecu-

tive days of idleness operated as a cancellation. That was because we had a city administration then that represented labour. They thought it was a cute trick to put a martingale on capital."

Egan was again pathetically royal, although his fears were increasing.

"And with my father giving his house and every cent of his cash assets to the city, they went and cancelled ——"

"Yes, Bronson. You can't complain; the city had a right to do it. I'm sorry to say it was to the city's interest to do it. You see, that land would fetch every cent of fifty thousand a year in the market, and . . ."

"Who engineered it — Eddie Macklin?"

"Yes; he's city counsel. He's the only one who *could* do it."

Egan pounded the desk with his closed fist. "I wouldn't trust that man —"

"I know, Bronson, and after the year he spent in here with me, neither would I, generally speaking, but you've got to give the devil his due. It was his duty to advise that cancellation — his duty to his oath of office. And when he did it, it meant his losing the twenty-five thousand he'd put into Egan stock himself, as well as the hundred and fifty thousand he'd invested out of his trust funds. It looks like the one really big thing Eddie ever did. No, don't blame him this time, Bronson; and I don't know *who* to blame. Nobody, I guess. It's just our cussed bad luck."

When Egan spoke, after a long hiatus, it was with a reminiscence of his father's stoicism. During the interval his mind, trained for the last four years to en-

compass grave disasters and discount them, to receive instantaneous impressions and act on them, functioned according to its training. Already he was trying to adjust himself to the facts. He had already accepted them verbatim. It was a great tragedy, but in recognizing its existence, and ceasing to combat any idea that it couldn't exist, he had passed over the summit of his wretchedness.

"What's happened to the plant, Uncle George?"

"It's being dismantled. They're selling off the machinery now. There wasn't another site anywhere, no orders, no organization. The directors voted to dissolve. Kent's going to build a model factory there when labour's easier; he's taken a long lease at fifty thousand flat."

"Do you know what the company's financial condition is?"

"Oh, there'll be nothing left, Bronson. Not a soumarkee. The Government had made some big advances of money that weren't earned yet, and the plant was full of half-finished war-products that aren't only worth scrap prices, now the war's over. The assets won't any more than equal the liabilities, if they do *that* — even counting the patents."

"Can the company sell my father's patents?" There was no belligerence in his tone; he was frankly asking for information.

"You're only a minority stockholder now, Bronson."

"But didn't he leave *me* his —"

"He left you all his interest in The Egan Company. The company owned the patents, and it's got to sell 'em in liquidation."

Egan passed his hand over his eyes.

"I see that. . . . What have I got to live on, then, Uncle George?"

The Judge's voice was very kind.

"I really don't know, Bronson. You get your father's personal effects, and some stock in The Egan Company that's worth about ten cents on the hundred dollars, and that's all. Have you got anything yourself?"

"Only about eighteen hundred. Well — it's just as good you didn't try to cable me all that — I'm glad you didn't."

"I thought you'd say so. . . . What do you think of doing, Bronson?"

He shook his head. All his perspective had fled away from him.

"I'll have to think . . . I can't decide anything just yet. It's come on me too suddenly. There's no hurry, anyway. But if I've got to go out and work for a living, why, with my experience —"

"Yes, it oughtn't to be much trouble for you to find a job, Bronson."

Egan regarded him blankly. "Job? Well — hardly. I'll scare up something, Uncle George. But I guess it'll be my own business. I hardly think I'd care to go to work for anybody else. Not just yet, anyway."

The Judge, rather taken aback, cleared his throat, and decided to let the subject drop. It disturbed him to observe that there was still a strong vein of overconfidence in Egan. "Where are you staying tonight?"

"Plainfield House, I guess."

"Can you dine with me and spend the evening, boy?"

Egan gave a great sigh, and straightened his shoulders.

"I'll dine with you, Uncle George, and be glad to. But I can't spend the evening."

"Other engagements so soon?"

The son of Old Man Egan stood up, shook himself, and laughed. Brought up in luxury, trained for power, a cavalier of the clouds by recent profession, and cast adrift in the world at twenty-five without capital and without prospects, Egan could still laugh. The first shock had passed, and he was prouder — infinitely prouder — than ever.

"Right-o, Uncle George. I'm going to a dance."

The Judge, clearing his throat, eyed the ribbons on Egan's blouse, and nodded several times, as though to indicate that courage in an Egan was a quality he could understand. He picked up his pipe. His hands were far more unsteady than Egan's.

"You're taking it the way the Old Man would like to have you, Bronson."

Egan caught himself. "I thought the war was all over. Maybe it's not. My own special, private war, I mean. Well — it doesn't do any good to gloom about it, does it? We've made our reconnaissance. We know the ground. If I've got to start in fighting all over again, why, let's go. *I'm* ready."

V

AS Bronson Egan, walking not so very rapidly for a young man on his way to keep a tender appointment, approached the corner of Vine Street, he was gradually aware of a certain soft and fitful illumination, not caused by any celestial body; and as he peered with quickening imagination through the summer night, he came in view of an extended lawn, dotted with fine old trees, and lying dark as velvet beneath the swaying tremulousness of dozens and dozens of Japanese lanterns. Japanese lanterns! He had entirely forgotten that anything so frail, so sentimental, so unessential to the prosecution of the war could still exist. The scene struck him as one of the eggshells of life, and startled him by its very delicacy.

There was a two-foot hedge bordering the lawn, and as he paused to look across it, he was bewildered to perceive that back among the elms, where the Kents' house had been, was a new white mansion, long and broad, and glimmering now with lights from every window. As far as Egan's knowledge went, this was still the Kents' property, although Mrs. Kent had said nothing of a new house; but what puzzled Egan was that such a house should have been erected during the war. It didn't seem exactly consistent.

He stood there, thinking. Across the lawn he caught a glimpse of elusive drapery; a girl was sauntering here and there among the trees. The whole picture was somehow drenched with youth, and he, Bronson Egan,

stood apart, looking in upon it, and feeling very aged and full of troubles about to happen.

He straightened; the girl was coming towards him; he could see her features quite clearly now; and he was involuntarily afire with the flame that is youth before age or trouble dampens it. As he leaped over the hedge the girl stopped with a little cry, and then ran forward.

"Why — Bronson!" she said.

Egan took her hungrily into his arms; held her soft, warm daintiness to him for the space of a single heart-beat; kissed her. The flame of youth, which had surged to its highest point as their lips met, flickered, and died, and was ashes in Egan's consciousness.

"Hello, Mary," he said.

They stood there in a partnership of embarrassment; the man who thought he had learned by trial so many of the secrets of the universe, and the girl who had stayed at home, sheltered, guarded, innocent. Memory was rushingly alive within them; on his last evening in Plainfield, and on this same shadowy lawn, they had sent a wealth of promises through clearing.

"I . . . I'm so glad you remembered, Bronson."

"Remembered what?"

"To come early . . . I'm *so* proud of you . . ."

Egan flushed. "They used to say the best soldier was the one that had a wireless from his bayonet to some girl's knitting needle. . . . I never happened to have to use a bayonet myself, but —"

"And I can't knit!" They laughed simultaneously; unnaturally.

"When did you build this house, Mary?"

"It's just finished . . . This is the housewarming."

"It looks like a fine house — from here."

"It's beautiful, Bronson. Just beautiful —"

"Yes. Your father must have kept the factory fires burning, too."

Mystified both by his words and his restraint, she hesitated.

"He's been working terribly hard — first here, and then in Washington — if that's what you mean."

Frowning a little, Egan took the conversation in a different direction.

"You're not . . . engaged . . . or anything yet, are you?" he demanded brusquely, and the girl shuddered and laughed in the same instant.

"How ferocious you are! What ever made you ask that?"

"Something Judge Perkins said at dinner, that's all."

She stood plucking at the fabric of her gown.

"Tell me, Bronson. Am I supposed to be . . . engaged?"

"That seemed to be the idea."

"Who was it?"

"You ought to know if any one does."

"Oh — Bronson!"

"Well — why don't you deny it?"

"Don't be *silly!* Let's sit down somewhere, shall we?" She drew him beside her to a circular bench under a patriarchal elm; the radiance of a single golden lantern fell across her face, etherealizing it. She was a dark-eyed little girl, black haired and princess-like, wonderfully delicate of feature and complexion, yet with a spirit and vivacity foreign to her type which had

kept Plainfield at her feet for half a decade. She was two years younger than Egan, but no one would have suspected it. "I didn't ask you to come early to talk about me; I asked you to talk about you. Now tell me all about it while I've got you to myself."

"All about what, Mary?"

"Everything you've done — everything!"

"I couldn't do that if I talked for the next twenty years. But I drove an ambulance for three months, and then I got into the French Air Service. I had a little over a year there, and then switched to ours."

"Oh, we know *that!* Did you . . . did you get any Huns?"

"Nine altogether — that is, nine officially. Five for France and four for us. Actually, I got fifteen. But the others weren't confirmed."

She admired him tremendously. "We *are* proud of you, Bronson dear. You're the only birdman we've got. . . . And all your lovely decorations? Whatever were they for?"

"I'll show you the citations sometime," said Egan. "Who's coming tonight? The old crowd?"

"Pretty nearly. There are some awfully nice new ones, too. Martha's sweet, isn't she? And she dances — Oh! That reminds me. Aren't you going to ask me for a dance?"

"I told you I —"

"Oh, but you could sit out, couldn't you?"

"I hardly thought that would be fair to the other fellows."

"Stupid! You can have three — just three. . . . What makes you so solemn, Bronson?"

"Am I? Thinking, probably. Not very complimentary, is it?"

"Well — if it's about me, of course —"

"No," said Egan, untactfully truthful, "it wasn't."

She pretended that she was gravely offended.

"You're not as gallant as you used to be, Bronson."

"Probably not, but I'm more sincere. I've learned a lot. Especially in the last twenty-four hours."

She smiled straight up at him.

"What were you thinking then — and not about me? Was it somebody so *very* much nicer? Somebody you met in France — some awfully nice nurse, or —"

"No. Just about Judge Perkins, and poor old Stanley Adams, and —"

"Oh!" She compressed her lips a trifle. "You haven't been back long enough yet, I suppose, to hear all those things. . . . Mr. Adams came home last January."

"I know."

"He's on the *Times* again — and I might as well tell you — nobody that *is* anybody has anything to do with him any more, Bronson. It's . . . it's awful. You can't afford it. He's a disgrace to Plainfield! You just ought to hear what Father says about him! And even at that, Father says he's a perfect angel now, compared with what he was in New York."

Egan's voice had more than a trace of obstinacy in it.

"He used to live with us. He was mighty kind to me, Mary."

"That doesn't make any difference. He's a disgrace! He —"

"As I remember it, he used to be quite a social light when —"

"Well, they've suspended him from the Metropolitan Club."

"Uncle Stanley?"

"Certainly. For drunkenness! So you can imagine what I thought this afternoon when you went down Main Street —"

"Somebody had to help him. I'm glad I was there."

She looked at him firmly, but a little fearfully.

"I'm beginning to believe you'd do better to think a little less about Plainfield and a little more about me, Bronson."

"I wish I could."

She stamped her foot at him.

"Bronson! What *is* the matter with you?"

He shook himself, and forced a laugh. "Overcome by the past, I guess. . . . Has anybody told you lately how pretty you are?"

"Oh, lots of people," she said. "But I never thought *you'd* get that far — not tonight, anyway."

"Well, it's true . . ."

There was a prolonged silence. The girl, who had become extraordinarily serious, touched his arm.

"Bronson," she whispered.

"Yes?"

"I don't want to hurt you — I don't want you to think I haven't liked you more than almost anybody else in the whole world — I don't want you to . . . oh, Bronson, dear, *I* know what's kept you so solemn — not solemn, exactly, but — I've been thinking of it, too, dear, and I like you so much . . . but it's been so long,

and so many, many things have changed and we've both grown up, and been away from each other, and met different people, and —"

"Mary!"

"I . . . I said I'm not engaged. . . . It isn't announced yet, but —"

"Oh!" said Egan. His jaw came forward the merest trifle. "Oh! Didn't you know *I* was expecting to marry you?"

"We were both to be perfectly free, Bronson, if — I thought you'd probably have met somebody over there you liked better. I really believed you would, Bronson. I —"

"We had an understanding," he said, very quietly. "Had you forgotten it?"

She tried gently to calm him; she was herself not calm enough.

"Don't, Bronson! Don't quarrel with me, dear! Not tonight of all nights in the world! Can't you understand? I couldn't bear not to have you know it. I thought surely you'd come to tell me the same thing. I —"

"I've loved you," he said. "I always loved you. Ever since the day I licked Eddie Macklin for you. Remember it? That's a long time, Mary. I wondered why you stopped writing to me, but *I* didn't forget. You used to be in the air with me. You —" He tugged at his blouse pocket, plucked out a bit of faded, discoloured fabric, and held it to her. "I never went up once without that . . . we all have talismans or what d'you call 'em — sort of a superstition with us — I carried it all the time I was flying. That's how

much I let myself forget you for somebody else."

She plucked at it nervously.

"Why — what is it?"

"Handkerchief — one of yours. I stole it that last night."

"Really?" It was a woe-begone little object now, but the souls of nine Huns were, in a manner of speaking, officially bound up in it (to say nothing of the six who had been unconfirmed), and the girl who had owned it was powerfully stirred. "Why . . . why, Bronson . . . isn't that — that stain in the corner —"

"Just a little blood," he said. "That was the day I got my wound stripe — he caught me in the shoulder. Let me have it again, please. I want it."

"It's mine, isn't it?"

"It was. It's mine now . . . So you couldn't wait?" His mouth bent in a grim smile. "And I was counting on you tonight, too. Well —"

"Oh, Bronson, *please* —"

"Who is it, Mary?"

"Won't you . . ."

"I want to know. Don't you think I'm entitled to that much?"

She lifted her face to him, and Egan saw that her eyes were wet.

"It's . . . it's Eddie Macklin," she whispered.

The son of Old Man Egan flinched. Then he put out his hand. He was preternaturally calm, because he had received today so many shocks that his nerve defence was all but impregnable.

"It's not," he said quietly. "That's what Judge Perkins said, too — but it's not!"

"Bronson, you're hurting me!"

"I'm sorry. But —"

"Let's go in. Please let's go in. I can't stand it, Bronson. Not any more."

"Just a minute, Mary. I've come back to marry you. I need you now. Four years ago I just wanted you. Now I need you."

"Bronson, dear," she choked. "Don't you understand English? I can't."

The son of Old Man Egan felt all the violent arbitrariness of his nature leaping to the surface. He dismissed the thought that her father was an officer of the bank which had helped to ruin him. He ignored the fact that he was without money, without a definite future, without a moral right to commit himself to matrimony before he had demonstrated that at least he could support himself.

"You will," he said. "You will. Or else you lied with your lips when you kissed me!"

They were both on their feet; the girl frightened, palpitant, wide-eyed; and Egan passionately grim.

"Bronson!"

He stepped towards her.

"Bronson! Don't!"

She was in his arms, helpless.

"Never again until you ask it, Mary — but this time —"

"Bronson Egan! Don't you *dare!*"

"I've dared too long to have any fears left, Mary. And I told you I was counting on tonight . . ." He bent, and while she fought furiously against him, kissed her hair — her forehead, then, as she suddenly

went limp in his arms — her lips. He released her. "I'll not ask your pardon, either . . . Nor will I lay a finger on you ever again so long as I live, without you ask it . . . But I'll wait until the minister has said 'Amen' to you and some other man before I stop waiting for you, and hoping for you, and wanting you, and that's the solemnest promise I ever made. I can't lose everything in the world, Mary . . . We'll wait until you're yourself, and then go in . . . I'll not be mean enough to sit out dances with you while there are men who want to dance them, but —"

"I *loathe* you!" she gasped.

"No, you don't," said Egan, "no, you don't, and what's more, you never will, either. And now if you're steady again — you poor, dear little girl . . . let's go in to your party. Not steady yet? I'll help you . . . There's my arm, Mary — you'd better take it before I put it around you. Good. Take your time, dear, there's no hurry. That's it. You're all excited now — *I* know. I'm sorry. No, I'm not either. But you want to get your strength back for your party. Talk to me a little, can't you? About anything at all — anything but us. Talk to me about anything at all, as long as you talk, and forget how rough I've been to you — won't you?"

VI

MR. EDWARD MACKLIN, a plump and smiling young courtier in the most zestfully tailored of evening clothes, was in the very act of arriving; and when Mr. Edward Macklin took it upon himself to arrive anywhere, he made the occasion as memorable as he could. His greeting to his hostess was halfway between the salutation of a lover and the urbanity of a politician meeting an important constituent; he conveyed a delicate impression that he was deeply honoured, but that it was desirable to shinny on your own side nevertheless.

"You got my flowers?" he inquired in a discreet undertone.

Mrs. Kent gave him a flattered matron's smile of benediction.

"Yes, you thoughtful boy. Don't you see I'm wearing them?"

Mr. Macklin professed the greatest astonishment and pleasure.

"They're so much prettier than I remembered." Mrs. Kent caught this on the fly, and glowed over it. "Is Mary down yet?"

"She just ran out to the lawn a moment. Those were lovely roses you sent her, too. She's tremendously excited, Edward . . . I suppose you know Bronson Egan came back this afternoon?"

The faintest flicker crossed Macklin's eyes. He laughed lightly. "Is that why Mary's so excited?"

"Silly boy! He's coming tonight, too."

"Indeed!" Macklin was non-committal.

"Yes; we met him on Main Street this afternoon. He said he'd come. And with all the . . . the disappointments he's having, I'm afraid he'll feel just the least little bit out of it. Passé. You know what I mean. And you two used to be such awfully good friends, too. So if you'd just see that he meets all the new people, and all the nicest girls —"

"Why, certainly," said Macklin with great heartiness. "That's what I'm here for — to do everything I can to make you and Mary happy."

She gave him a grateful pressure of the hand. "That's a dear boy. And find Mary for me, will you? And tell her that people are beginning to come now."

Through a thin stream of inevitably early guests, through a little knot of lovely, chattering girls, in luscious colours and dainty swirls of chiffon, Macklin picked his leisurely way through the French windows of the library to the red-bricked loggia, and standing there, surveyed the dotted lawn before him. He had ceased smiling. His mood was vaguely restless, and not at all soothed by the first strains of music from the house within.

"Ah!" he said presently, took one quick step forward, and stopped. And carefully put back the smile again.

Egan and Mary Kent, coming up arm in arm from the lower lawn, lifted their heads simultaneously, and beheld him. Mary, with a little exclamation which might have been for surprise, or might have been for relief, dropped Egan's arm and ran to him.

"Why, Bronson, old man! When did you get back? It's . . . why, it must be four years since you and I met each other!"

"Nearer fifteen," said Egan with enigmatic good-humour. He shook hands with Macklin, not out of friendship for Macklin, but of love of Mary.

Macklin looked down, with a proprietary air, not lost on Egan, at the girl who was beside him.

"People are coming, Mary. Your mother asked me to find you."

"Oh!" she said. "You'll . . . I'm afraid you'll both have to excuse me then."

"Don't give anybody else my dances, Mary!"

"I won't, Eddie. Don't worry."

The two men watched her flit out of sight. Macklin sighed profoundly. "Cigarette, Bronson?"

"Thanks. I've got a match right here. . . . Did you get it?"

Macklin inhaled gratefully.

"Yes. Much obliged. Well, how does it seem to be back?"

"Fine," said Egan, cordially. "How does it seem to still be here?"

Macklin leaned against a pillar of the loggia, and laughed with abandon. "You're caustic as ever, Bronson."

"It always did rile me to be patronized, Eddie."

"Affects you the way sarcasm does me, eh? I could be caustic myself if I wanted to, but I don't want to."

"That so? What could you be caustic about?"

Macklin gesticulated with the grace of a trained platform speaker.

"Why, if you'd been home helping your father, as you ought to have been, instead of going off looking for glory, I wouldn't have lost every sou I had in the world, and put myself in wrong with my best clients. Confidentially, my faith in your blamed old Egan Company just about broke me. It was a shame, too — one of the best known concerns we had here. I dare say you've seen Judge Perkins? I thought so. I'm not talking in riddles, then."

"I can't swear to that," said Egan, thoughtfully. "But I think I can understand what you say. It's a queer business, Eddie, awfully queer. Don't you think so yourself?"

"You're very touchy, aren't you?" He straightened his tie, and dropped his voice a semitone. "Would you be offended if I told you I'm sorry for your loss, Bronson? I mean your family loss — your father."

"No, on the contrary. I'm indebted to you."

Macklin shrugged his shoulders, and puffed at his cigarette. The two men were silent, listening to the distant music, the sound of gay young voices. Neither of them appreciated how young they, too, might appear to any disinterested onlooker.

"We'll have to do our duty and go in soon, Bronson. I think it might brace you up a little if you realized that things in Plainfield have changed a good deal since you left. For one thing, I'm not quite so much of a nonentity. In fact, I've done rather well, for me, in spite of dropping most of my money in your company. I'm in a position to be a good friend of yours. I hope to be. But naturally, it rests more with you than it does with me."

"Why so?"

"Because I'm the one who's ready. I'm the one who's always been ready." He waited expectantly. "Haven't you anything to say to that?"

Egan's eyes were wrinkled at the corners. "Eddie, do you remember the only real fight you and I ever had?"

Macklin grimaced. "Considerably. You almost murdered me."

"I'm afraid I did. Not until after you bit me, though."

"Bite?" echoed Macklin, with extreme doubt. "I don't seem to recall that part of it."

"I'd have bet you wouldn't. Nor what the fight was about. But the trouble is, Eddie, that, once bit, twice shy."

Macklin's lips retained their curve, and none of the ingratiating quality went out of his voice.

"What's that, Bronson? A polite method of telling me to go to the devil?"

"It's as polite as I know how to make it, time and place considered."

Macklin shook his head. "I don't like that in you, Bronson. Maybe I *did* bite — Good Lord! We were about twelve years old, weren't we? What did you expect, Marquis of Queensberry rules? What's the matter with you, anyway? Have you been carrying that spite around all these years just to hold up against me now when I come to you, offering you —"

"Offering me what, Eddie?"

"All I've got to offer — my friendship when you're in trouble."

Egan fired the words back at him. "Who said I'm in trouble?"

Macklin stood up. "Why —"

"Don't misunderstand me, Eddie. I'm not planning to start anything. But as long as you've put it so plainly, I don't care for your sympathy just now, and I don't see any reason for it. 'In trouble?' Why, you don't know what trouble is! Do I look to you like a man in trouble? What kind of trouble? And to keep on being frank about it, suppose I were in trouble, exactly what do you think you could do to help me?"

Macklin studied the last inch of his cigarette. "You seem to think I've insulted you. It's a rather funny attitude for you to take, considering what I *did* say."

"I know perfectly well what you said. But I fail to see how it'll do either of us the slightest good to bluff. We aren't friends, and we never will be, and you know it as well as I do. Come on out and admit it like a man. There isn't room for you and me in the same house, or the same club, or the same town. So why try to salve it over? I don't get you on that at all."

"They haven't taught you much diplomacy in the Army, have they, Bronson?"

"Not a bit."

Macklin stroked his chin reflectively.

"Well, I seem to be put in my place, all right. I'm sorry. I am, honestly. You always were mighty rough when you got started, but this time you're starting wrong. I've liked you, Bronson — I always did — even when you licked me. I've admired you a heap. This isn't salve, either. I admired your going into service — something I couldn't afford. Twit me all

you want to. I had a mother and a sister to support, and you didn't. But I can admire you for being able to go; and you can't even give me credit for wanting to go, too, and having to stay home. When the stories about you drifted back here, I was proud to know you. I'd give my shirt for one of those ribbons of yours — not all three, but just one. I admire you right now, because it takes nerve to say what you've just said to me. I'm not a zero in this town, Bronson; and one or two people have found it out to their disadvantage. As your friend, I could make some things a good deal easier for you. I've felt that I owed you a little something extra, because of what I had to do as a city official — although that broke me completely, just as it broke you. I was figuring on going pretty far out of my way to help you. But if you don't care to have it that way —"

"I don't, Eddie. Thanks for being frank about it, though."

"Quite so. It's a bargain. All I wanted was to get a line on how you felt." Macklin brushed invisible lint from his coat collar. "Now Mrs. Kent, who you'll admit couldn't very well be expected to know how much of a grudge you've got against me, asked me to see that you met the new people here tonight. I didn't feel like telling her then that you might not want me to, and I don't now. So to save all of us some embarrassment, would you mind letting me present you to a few people? I'll promise you that nobody'll cut you afterwards simply because the introduction came through me. Then I'll duck out. And either of us can explain to Mrs. Kent afterwards."

"Go ahead," said Egan. "Ready?"

"Whenever you are."

"I'm ready now."

"Allow me," said Macklin, courteously opening the door for Egan to enter.

Four years ago, he had been distinguished among his fellows, and now he wore the gaily-coloured ribbon-bars which proved that he had distinguished himself before the world. But he had never been popular in Plainfield; he had won great local prominence, but he had inspired too great a volume of envy ever to be truly popular. Tonight, it was known to every man under the Kents' roof that Egan was deprived of his wealth, his father, and his future. The conquests of his youth had faded into nothingness; his military record, glorious as it was, meant comparatively little, now that the public curiosity regarding the war and military affairs was sated. He had come home to be deprived of his balance of power; and as he stood with Macklin in the centre of the Kents' library, converted for the night into a smoking room, he sensed, for the first time, what sort of reception he might logically expect from those he had walked upon in the past.

For a moment, keyed to high excitement in the midst of old acquaintances, he stood with Macklin alone. There were a dozen men in the room — but men he had known for years —their conversation went on without a pause. Egan's nostrils dilated the merest trifle; Macklin glanced at him, and smiled quizzically.

"Bronson!" exclaimed some one. "Bronson Egan!"

And then Egan knew, with an inrush of relief which nearly suffocated him, that the old acquaintanceships were still valid, and that one of his greatest fears — conceived since the meeting in Judge Perkins' office — was groundless. His misfortunes had washed the envy out of mind.

To a man, the dozen rushed upon him. Foremost, was Little Johnny Jones — six feet three in his dancing pumps — and after that first terrific handshake, even Egan's fingers were numb for the rest. He tried to speak, but there was nothing to say. In his ignorance, he had fancied that the loss of his money might mean the loss of his friends.

"Bronson, you stiff-necked old Irishman! Put her there!"

"H'lo, Bronson. Where *you* been?"

"Glad to see you, old man. You're looking great! Say, hunt me up around lunchtime tomorrow — will you?"

"Hello, there, Bronson. Thought we'd lost you. Sit down and tell us about it."

"My heavens, man! How much'd you put on — twenty pounds?"

"Are you out yet?"

"Get him a drink — he's discharged, anyway."

"Cigar, old boy? Cigarette?"

"Say, Bronson, there's a girl here who's so crazy to meet you, she —"

Macklin put his hand on Little Johnny Jones' shoulder.

"Do me a favour, Johnny? I promised to present

Bronson to some of the new people. You do it for me, will you? I've got this dance taken."

Between two introductions, Egan, whose spirits had begun to lower again at the sight of Mary and Macklin dancing together, caught sight of the pretty stranger of the afternoon, who had just come in from the hallway.

She recognized him promptly as he approached her, and met him smilingly.

"I'm so glad you came, Lieutenant."

"So am I."

She continued to remind him of Mary, but she had about her a certain indomitable boyishness which made the principal difference, and gave her a strength of character which Mary lacked. She was all superlatives — the blackest of hair and eyes, the rosiest of cheeks, the trimmest of figures, and she was wearing an amber-coloured gown which Egan thought was the most entrancing creation he had ever looked upon. Her name still eluded him, but he hesitated to ask the bold question outright. Instead, he explained again that he wasn't dancing.

"Oh, I don't mind sitting it out," she alleged cheerfully. "It always amuses me to watch; doesn't it you?"

"Yes, it does," said Egan. "I suppose one reason is that most people look so happy when they're dancing."

"Don't they, though? You couldn't ever tell whether they had bad dispositions or not!"

"After what I've been through," said Egan, follow-

ing Mary Kent with his eyes, "it almost scares me to see a pretty girl in a pretty dress again."

She nodded with quick comprehension.

"They look so breakable?"

"Yes — and so angelic." He gave her a whimsical smile. "I'm not a Mormon, or anything like that, but I think I could adore every girl in this room without an effort. No matter what their dispositions are."

"We thank you," she said graciously.

He turned to look at her again, and liked her still better. There was a pleasant twinkle in her eyes, a friendly spark of companionship with no nonsense about it. He approved of her, inclusively. He liked her poise, and her naturalness. Her mere presence made him feel more normally synchronized to the world.

"You haven't lived in Plainfield very long," he said abruptly.

"I don't live here at all. I'm only a guest."

"Oh!"

She laughed spontaneously. "I'm sure you can't be as disappointed as all that, Lieutenant Egan."

"Would you be offended if I insist that I am?"

"No," she said, amused. "I don't believe I would. At a dance, one always makes allowances."

"Not always," said Egan, "and I *am* disappointed. I was hoping you lived here."

"I've been here long enough to hear a good deal about you, though."

"Really?"

"Oh, my, yes! Mary's talked so much about you that I felt I knew you rather well, even before I met you."

"Oh, she has, has she? I wonder what she could have said."

The pretty stranger smiled. "The nicest things she possibly could."

"Then she can't have told you so very much about me, after all. That's quite evident."

"You say that as though you're worried about something, Lieutenant Egan."

"Not to speak of. I'm sorry I gave you that impression."

"If it's anything *I* could . . . You see, I know Plainfield as an outsider knows it. I'm in the cross-currents. If I could —"

Egan shook himself. "I don't want to bore you with my troubles. I owe you an apology for getting into this sort of thing. Please don't hold it against me. . . . By the way, where do you live when you don't live in Plainfield?"

She gazed at him an instant, and unexpectedly stepped back. "Let's try it out of doors," she said. "Shall we? I don't believe you like it in here any better than I do."

Puzzled, but not unwilling, Egan permitted her to choose a path to the lawn. The hour was yet too early for sitters-out; they were practically isolated among the trees and lanterns. Egan discovered that the quiet and the dim light were soothing to him.

"Here!" she said. "Let's sit down here." It was, fortuitously, the same bench on which Egan had sat with Mary Kent an hour previous. "Now," she said, "suppose you just begin at the beginning and tell me all about it."

Egan stirred out of his lethargy. "Why — what do you mean?"

"Of course," she said gently, "there's no particular reason why you should trust *me* — I'm probably silly to expect it — but all my life, ever since I was a little girl, most of the boys I've ever known have come to me to hear their troubles. I can't help much; all I can do is to listen. But I try to understand. . . . It would have been just wasting time to watch the dancing and try to talk . . . I could tell that in a second. And perhaps I'm safer than some one else would be, because I don't live here . . . And it really isn't as personal as it sounds, you know; it's like talking to a tree, or something, because I'm so used to it. Why, the reason you said you were disappointed I don't live here was simply because you wished you knew me well enough to talk to me — wasn't it?"

Egan slowly nodded assent.

"You must be a very clever girl. You've hit it exactly."

"I'm not. But I understand men better than I do women. I've been wanting to talk to you, too." She waited patiently. "You've just come back from overseas?"

"Only today. I've been away four solid years."

"Oh." Her eyes were large and soft, but there wasn't the slightest trace of sentimentality about them. Her voice, too, was reassuring to Egan; it sounded like the voice of a friend who could be relied upon. She surveyed him earnestly.

"And while you've been away she's . . . she's got engaged?"

Egan jumped. "How on earth did you guess that?"

"I told you I'd heard a great deal about you. I suppose you must think I'm frightfully rude, but when I saw you up there tonight — it wouldn't have made the slightest difference who you happened to be, I just had to think about you."

"This isn't very interesting talk for a party," said Egan awkwardly. "No — I don't think you're rude. But if I'm as transparent as all that, I'd better wear a blanket over my face after this."

"You weren't transparent. I've known it for two weeks. It made me almost dread meeting you."

"Why?"

"Why, when any man has been big enough to leave everything he cares for, and then to come back and find — As soon as I saw you up there tonight, I realized you knew."

"It's a common enough occurrence these days, I suppose," he said bitterly.

"Maybe it is — but only once to each man. It's just as harsh and raw and discouraging for you as it is to any one else who's had to go through the same thing. I — I think I'll have to admit something to you, if you won't be too angry at me. I was going to look for you especially tonight."

Egan couldn't understand why it was that he found her sympathy so welcome. He couldn't understand why it was that the altruism of a stranger should move him so deeply. He didn't perceive that she had that great motherliness with which all girls of strong and gentle characters are born. He was cognizant only of

her sympathy, which he had won without flirting for it.

"Were you?"

She turned a degree or two towards him. In her manner there was a quality which he had never observed in any other girl, because he had never looked for it. Evidently she appraised him not as the great Bronson Egan, but as a young man hitherto without benefit of the confessional.

"Maybe you wouldn't imagine," she said, "that I'm much of a philosopher. I like outdoor sports, and dancing, and music, and about everything else that other girls like, and I came to this dance expecting to have a good time — dance every dance, and have a lot of men say nice, silly things to me, and all that . . . but if somehow I could make one man — make you — feel any better, any really happier, or any less unhappy, for talking to me about things that are real — I'd have a better time with myself, and think more of myself afterwards, than if I'd just . . . frivolled. You see, it's all such a contrast. Here's a whole houseful of people enjoying themselves, without a single care on their minds — and here's you. And it wouldn't make the slightest difference who you were, I couldn't stay up there and enjoy myself when I knew all this, and knew you were coming. Please don't think I'm martyring myself, Lieutenant Egan. I'd rather be here than there. Truly. Until you're tired of me. Dancing's something I can do any time . . . There's one thing, though, you ought to remember. It's about the men who went over. There's been so much talk, and so much in the papers, about their falling in love with English

and French girls . . . I'm not trying to do anything but show you how a girl who was left over here for a long time might get to thinking . . ."

"Some of them did do that. Thousands of them. But I didn't. Even some of the married ones . . . There was a Canadian I knew. Came from a small town, and married a stupid little girl he'd always known. And went to England and fell in love with a wonder. And didn't dare to go home, and he couldn't have the English girl anyway. He just draped himself over a Hun machine gun at Loos to settle his problem . . . But I waited."

"No one could ever blame you for being bitter, after everything that's happened to you —"

"Bitter?" repeated Egan. "I'm not bitter. That's over with and done for — since the last few minutes."

"What?"

"Since you were generous enough to give up so much of your evening to me. You've cheered me up wonderfully, just to know that there's somebody like you in the world. I don't need to tell you what's happened; you know it already. But it's good to have you say you know. No, I'm not bitter — but I've spent four years in learning how to take care of myself. I'm going to do it." He looked at her, and smiled grimly. "And I won't be so very easy with anybody who gets in my road. If you know so much about me — I suppose there's been plenty of gossip about one part of it, at least — you'll know what that means."

She was regarding him with serious concern.

"What are you going to do — fight your way back to where you want to be?"

"Every step of it." He held his lips compressed for the briefest moment, and suddenly burst out laughing. "For Heaven's sake, don't ever tell anybody what I've just said!"

"Are you ashamed of thinking it, or just saying it?"

"Saying it. By tomorrow morning I won't be able to look in the glass. It's the same old story. You tempted me to boast, and I fell. And I'm glad of it. Because I'm going to make it good."

"I believe you'll succeed," she said thoughtfully.

"So do I," said Egan, "provided I have luck."

"You'll never need much luck. You're not that kind of man. I'm really sorry for the . . . the one who couldn't wait for you. I'm a friend of hers, of course, but I can say that to you, can't I? Until a little while ago, I was sorriest for you. Now I'm beginning to feel that way about her."

"And why's that?"

"Because she's liable to miss the chance of making you into a very fine man." She said this with so little intent to flatter him that he was doubly flattered.

"In what way — that she'll miss the chance, or that I won't ever amount to a hill of beans anyway?"

She hesitated. "Intuitions are awfully funny things, Lieutenant . . ."

"I've often played hunches myself. They usually lose. But go ahead."

She looked up at him.

"If she misses the chance," she said, "you'll make

yourself a finer man than she could. You make me feel that you've got it in you to do splendid things. Only, from all I hear — you'll have to be careful. You're so awfully proud — so awfully confident — so awfully mercurial. I imagine you sometimes go ahead too blindly, without thinking things out. You've got a chip on your shoulder all the time. You'll have to get over that. You'll have to learn tact. And . . . and caution. But if you do —" She inclined a little towards him, "you may win back everything you've lost. Everything. Please think that over. Everything . . . I couldn't have gone to sleep tonight until I'd told you that. I know it. That's really what I brought you down here to tell you. Please don't misjudge me. I —"

"Are you sure of that?" he demanded, tense.

"Haven't I told you so? If you're careful and courageous, you'll win." She was tearing at her corsage bouquet. "I'll tell you how sure I am . . . I want to give you something to remember this by, so that twenty years from now you can look back, and see that I was right, so when I say 'I told you so,' you'll have to admit it. . . . Would you keep it just for that? Just to please me?"

Egan, staring at the little gold safety-pin she held out to him, was crimson.

"Now, how in the name of all that's holy," he said, "did you know I'm just the kind of creature to appreciate that?"

"Because of your eyes — and your tongue. You've a lot of imagination, and for all your talk, Lieutenant,

I'm not sure you've ever grown up. Would it help you to remember, a little?"

"Thank you," said Egan. "You make me very, very much afraid of you." He took the pin gingerly. "Now I don't know when anybody has played on my weaknesses like that —"

"And we're surely going to be friends, aren't we?" She said it so naturally and so pleasantly that Egan, who would have balked at the first trace of coquetry, was disarmed.

"You've been a better friend to me tonight than I have to myself. . . . I hope you'll let me come to see you sometime."

"I'll always be glad to have you — I'm at the Kents' for all the rest of this month, and I'll probably be here part of September and maybe a part of October, too."

Egan didn't respond. Across the lawn, a man was walking directly towards them — walking rapidly, almost running — and Egan had recognized him as Little Johnny Jones. He stood up.

"Bronson! Is that you?"

"What's the matter, Johnny?"

"Matter enough! Stanley Adams is up at the house looking for you! He's tight as a drum. Henry Luke's trying to hold him down, but they can't keep him quiet, and he won't go, and if he doesn't calm down, they'll have to throw him out, or call the police, or something. For the love of mud, come on and take him home. He won't go 'til he sees you. Mrs. Kent's having hysterics all over the place!"

"Till tomorrow!" said Egan over his shoulder.

VII

THE orchestra, following its instructions, was playing in fortissimo the loudest jazz in all its loud repertoire when Egan hurried into the house; and there were still many couples dancing, by the feverish request of their hostess. Egan noted, in his swift passing, that the faces of most of the men were stern-set, and that the faces of most of the girls reflected apprehension; and even although he could hear, above the tumult of the orchestra, the ring of voices from the smoking-room, and could judge of the confusion caused by poor old Stanley Adams, uninvited and irresponsible, he was still mightily scornful of the whole party — scornful that forty adult males couldn't handle a trifling emergency like this without calling for Bronson Egan. All they could conceive was violence. They had no adaptability. And what was the fuss about, anyway? Why should it have caused more than an instant's flurry. What delicate susceptibilities these townsfolk had! It came to him, suddenly, that perhaps only he, out of all that gathering, was trained in a school in which the emergency was the usual thing. To have to send for a specified individual in order to remove one undesired spectator!

As he reached the library, with Little Johnny Jones at his heels, he saw Adams, guarded by half a dozen reluctant volunteers, at bay before the fireplace. Henry Luke, whose undergraduate nickname had been "Deacon," was endeavouring to appeal to his reason.

"*There!*" roared Adams. "There he is—he is *so!* Lied to me, didn' you — you . . . *Told* you he's here, 'n here he is! *Lied* to me —"

"Uncle Stanley!" Egan had him by the arm. "You hush yourself up! Here I am. I was down on the lawn. Just going home — just this minute. You're coming with me, aren't you?" He was wholly unconscious of the reaction of the men about him. "I just dropped in to take you home, Uncle Stanley. You and I are going together. Aren't we? You bet we are. Where's your hat?"

"Here's his hat, Bronson. For Heaven's sake, if you can keep him from shouting on the street —"

"Oh, shut up, Henry! Right you are, Uncle Stanley. . . . Who's going to take his other arm?"

"I've got him, Bronson." That was from Little Johnny Jones, and no one else had moved. "Guess you forgot I was here, didn't you?"

"I certainly did. Come on, then. Where does he live?"

"Same place I do."

Together, they steered him, tractable enough now, out through that silent, intolerant lane of men; together they passed the terrified, unforgiving scrutiny of their hostess, receiving lavender salts in the hallway; together they guided the journalist out to the sweet night air.

"You're a peach, Johnny," said Egan. "You're a prince. Watch that step, there . . ."

"I've got it. Turn right."

"I . . . I am all ego . . . but not egotism," remarked Adams, quite distinctly. "Stood before Spinx

. . . Shphink . . . oh, that damn' concrete bird in Egypt . . . Sphinx . . . at midnight, an' all ego lef' me. Un'stan'? Lef' me. Quit me cold. 'At un'-stood by every gen'leman present? Call next case. Hurray for crime!"

"Where do you live, Johnny?"

"1630 Vine."

Egan stumbled inadvertently.

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Oh — that's so, isn't it? I thought you knew it. Why, yes, it's leased to a Mrs. McCain to run for a boarding-house, and it's a pretty decent old shack in a good location, you know, so I moved in a week ago. So'd he, just about the same time. Say, he's a bird, isn't he?"

"Bird? Wha's bird do besides sing? I like to hear li'l birds sing," remarked Mr. Stanley Adams. "That damn' concrete Egypt bird . . . Spink . . . ol' Billy Napoleon shot her nose off, but look a' her mouth! Gen'lemen, on my bended knees I pray you, look a' her mouth. Mona Lisa. Tha's all the 'Talian I know. Mona Lisa. You think I'm 'Talian t' hear me speak language, would you not? Yes, you would not. So'm I. Riddle of ages, Mona Lisa. I mean Spink. Concrete riddle bird. . . . Pers'nally, I consider dirty Irish trick shoot off her nose. Never shot off lady's nose all m' life. Wouldn' know wha' do with it after — I — shot — it — off. Can't wear it on watch chain. Wha'd he shoot her off *for?* Bronson — le's get Ouija board — ask Tommy Napoleon why he shot off nose. Woosh!" This was mere joviality rushing to the surface.

"He's a lot quieter now," said Little Johnny Jones. "When we get in, I'll slip downstairs and make him a cup of coffee —"

"Oh! Are you onto that, too, Johnny?"

"Rather. I've lived in the same house with him for a week. It's like paregoric to a baby. Here we are. Column right, *march!* . . . Look natural, Bronson?"

They were going up the front walk of Egan's boyhood home, and the cast-iron stags were still on guard, and looking very familiar. But Egan had no opportunity to be sentimental.

Now after the transgressor had been flooded with bitter black coffee and put away comfortably for the night — which was no idle task — Little Johnny Jones and Egan sat in the room formerly reserved for distinguished visitors of the highest rank, and went into executive session. It was Johnny's room now, and characteristic of him. Excessively disordered, it still retained the marks of a broad and cheerful personality; from the luxury and brilliance of the unnumbered neckties hanging from the electric light fixture, to the heap of miscellaneous treasures on the centre table. Every available inch of space was tenanted; a handsome hat-box served as receptacle for silver toilet articles, letters, golf balls, and cigarettes; clothing was everywhere; tobacco was nowhere out of reach; and every corner fairly dripped with matches. The room was redolent of the very spirit of youth, which admits no minor responsibilities. Egan hadn't felt so thoroughly at home for four years.

"Know what you're going to do, Bronson?" asked Jones, finally.

Egan yawned. "Not yet, Johnny. Get out of uniform as quick as I can, and start something going."

"Got a place to stay yet?"

"No. Hadn't even thought about it."

"Why don't you come and live here? There's plenty of rooms vacant — the one you used to sleep in isn't taken yet. Have that. I think she wants fifteen a week for it."

Egan started to laugh at the price, but desisted, out of consideration for Johnny.

"That sounds reasonable; I might do it."

After a prolonged silence, Little Johnny Jones burst out: "Bronson, how much rough stuff can you stand?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm afraid some of the crowd has got it in for you. . . . Not ours, exactly, but the older crowd. I don't want to hurt your feelings, Bronson, but you ought to know that quite a few people aren't disappointed to have you in dutch."

"I guessed that."

"I'm simply warning you, old man. Don't ask too many favours. Understand?"

"Easily. I didn't intend to."

"And about the social end of things — are you going to be supersensitive?"

"I doubt it, Johnny."

"Because — oh, thunder! You've got eyes in your head, haven't you? Money means more than it used to in Plainfield; family means more. You mustn't

let it get on your nerves. . . . We're all back of you, but —"

"Well," said Egan, "as far as I've been able to find out, money's the standard for just two kinds of people — the kind that got it without working for it, and the kind that's scared to death for fear they never *will* get it. That's nothing. It doesn't interest me."

Jones motioned towards the door. "And about that fellow across the hall. He doesn't belong any more. Of course I know how you feel about him, but you know what happened tonight — well, that's typical. And a lot of people won't appreciate what you think about him."

Egan failed to respond. At length: "What do you know about Eddie Macklin?"

"Finest chap in town," said Jones promptly. "He didn't use to be, but he's developed wonderfully. Ever since that loss he took on Egan Company stock, he's a sort of popular hero. And a good friend of yours, too."

"Not exactly."

"I know better, Bronson. He's been boosting you —"

At this juncture, the door opened, and Stanley Adams came wandering in, clad in pajamas and a gorgeous dressing-gown. He was painfully unsteady, but partly sober, after a brief sleep, and his eyes were glowing with the brilliance of his stimulation.

"Hello, boys."

The two exchanged glances.

"Sit down, Adams. Have something to smoke?"

"Thanks . . . oh, my head! Go ahead and bust,

confound you, and get the thing finished! Don't let me interrupt you — what were you talking about?"

"Eddie Macklin."

The journalist nodded.

"Not a bad topic. No, I'll take that back. A very bad topic. Ugh! Either this is rotten shag you fellows smoke, or else I'm off colour . . . well, what about him?"

"I'm telling Bronson that Eddie's a real citizen."

The journalist made a wry face.

"You'll excuse me, boys, if I deliver my famous lecture on the nonentity of the non-existent nought? . . . Thank you. I am occupied by a large quantity of liquor, boys, and I lecture best when slightly wafted aloft. . . . Johnny, my lad, the only virtue in life is good judgment. Ergo, you're drenched in vice. Your judgment is punk. You think a thing is true simply because it agrees with your own experience. There is a difference between truth and accuracy. You are accurate, Johnny, but untruthful. Don't ask me what I mean — I don't know. I will now proceed, my dear hearers, to chapter Two. Life. Life is like a series of spiral springs, set vertically — we go 'round the loops, generation after generation — sometimes going higher, sometimes going lower. Lower. Where was I? Oh, yes. If you're going up, you have to keep going around the loops — before you can get up, you have to go down, but when you're at the bottom of a higher loop, you're higher up than you were at the bottom of the lower loop . . . *n'est-ce pas?* French. Eventually, all of us will be at the top of the spring. Millennium. Hang the clergy. Q. E. D."

Jones and Egan looked at each other.

"There's nothing new under the sun. Easter isn't a Christian holiday — it's a pagan festival to celebrate the birth of spring and the death of winter. John D. Rockefeller isn't a novelty — he's just another Solomon. Solomon was the first president of a trust company. Read your Bible. Somebody stole mine nineteen years ago, and I can't remember to buy another. . . . There's nothing new. Not even a new Bible for me. All is unchangeable, except human nature, but there's nothing new. A dog walks around before he lies down; his wild ancestors did it to mat down the grass. Human nature is eternal. I have stood before the Sphinx at midnight, and there's no answer. Civilization was born in Egypt more years before Christ than we've lived after it — four thousand years of veneer washed off by a married man kissing another man's wife, or by the distant jingle of a dollar bill. If the Ten Commandments were obeyed, there could be no wealth, and no modern improvements. Eddie Macklin's a pole-cat, net, and if Bronson had been omniscient, he'd have choked him to death fifteen years ago when he had a chance. *N'est-ce pas?* French."

Little Johnny Jones was interested.

"What makes you think so, Adams?"

"Because the world is just," said the journalist, swaying gently from side to side. "Justice is conscience. Everything depends on conscience. Ergo, on justice. Q. E. D. If there's a God, He's got to be just — love has got to be just — everything's got to be just. Justice is logic. If the world isn't logical, we'd better go jump off the dock. Life hereafter —

spiral spring. If you've been good in this world, you go up a loop next time. Bad, you go down a loop. Reincarnation — all pagans believe it. The Turk's harem. The Indian's happy hunting ground. Eddie's going to be reincarnated into a snapping turtle with a Mona Lisa smile. I've stood before the Sphinx at midnight —"

"Yes, I know," said Egan. "The Cooks ought to give you a commission, Uncle Stanley. But Eddie's clever, isn't he?"

"Clever? Hah! 'Course he's clever — as things go. Man's got to be either damn clever or damn stupid to be a politician. But *clever?* In the larger sense? Boys, after I stood before the Sphinx at midnight, I entered the pyramid of Cheops. The Egyptian thought the immortality of the soul depended on the preservation of the body. He salted his relatives. Preserved them. Pickled them. Not as I am pickled, but permanently — ah, the Egyptians! Pyramid was to make sure ol' Ferdie Cheops wasn't disturbed. Then along come the Cook's tourists. Hunt for the door. Door ought to be in middle of one side, down on the ground level — *n'est-ce pas?* French. Was it? No. Fifty feet up, thirteen feet left centre. Took 'em four thousand years to find the latch-key. Crawl in on hands and knees to the lobby,— had to tunnel into it; blocked up by stones that can't be blasted with T N T — monolith in marble, two sarcophagi. Cheops and Mrs. Cheops? Nix. Poof! Vanished. Observe, ladies and gentlemen, no cuffs or moustache to deceive. Some say the hand is quicker than the eye. Now you see the Cheopses; now you don't. Lift the middle shell. An-

other dollar gone. But they found the Cheops family up in an attic through the ceiling. Four thousand years! *Clever?* Eddie Macklin clever? Hell!"

"He's a good booster for Bronson though."

"He's a crook and a hypocrite and a blackguard, and I've believed from the time he got a strangle-hold on the Egan Company, he strangled it. I believe he'd tomahawk his grandmother for a side-bet of a dollar and a quarter. I believe he juggled you folks on your land, and I always will. Apart from that, I believe he's as pure in heart as Galahad was when he was asleep!"

"What makes you think so?" asked Egan.

"This." Adams tapped his forehead. "Little grey clusters of brain, Mr. Stanley Adams, sole proprietor and general manager. . . . Every time I think of that damn Spinx I get sleepy. If you two pragmatists will excuse me, I am, with renewed assurances of my most respectful consideration —"

"It's too far to walk back to the hotel," said Little Johnny Jones. "And it's two o'clock. Bunk here with me, why don't you?"

"Good idea," said Egan.

"Then you can see Mrs. McCain in the morning. All right. Let's call it a day."

"Fine." Egan yawned whole-heartedly. "I got pretty well toughened up in service, but believe me, I'm tired. It's been *some* day! . . . Oh, by the way, Johnny, do you happen to know the name of that girl I was talking to when you came out to get me?"

"Yes. She's Martha Henderson. Lives in Dayton.

House-guest of the Kents. Seems like a nice girl, doesn't she? "

"Hm," said Egan, thoughtfully, as he thrust a gold safety-pin into the pocket-flap of the blouse he had just taken off. "Yes, she does."

No wonder her features had been familiar to him.

VIII

HE woke in the early morning, fully refreshed, and for a time lay in half-conscious revery, prolific of golden memories and still more golden plans. Little Johnny Jones was still subdued in sleep; Egan watched him for a minute or two, grinned, and crept out quietly to the nearby bath. Half an hour later, he had renewed his acquaintance, in passing, with the gilt reception-room and the solid mahogany exhibit, and he was down on the lawn by the cast-iron stags, reviewing his youth.

It was not yet seven o'clock, and all the world was clean-washed, and cool and fragrant. Despite his monumental perplexities, Egan had responded buoyantly to the morning; his heart was lightened, and the weariness was absent from his eyes. Standing before the familiar old stable, he chuckled at the reminiscences which came to meet him; and, in his almost automatic adjustment to his present circumstances, felt scarcely a pang to think that all this property might have been his. That pang would come later, but there was no accommodation in his heart for it now. He was still chuckling jovially when from behind him he heard a smothered little exclamation, and turned to discover its source.

A few feet above him, on the slope of the lawn leading down to the stables, was a girl he had never seen before. She had evidently just come out of the house, and had been in full career when the sight of Egan had

stopped her, for her attitude was that of suddenly arrested action. She was an appealing little girl of perhaps seventeen, an ash-blonde, with big and childlike eyes, and she was wearing a gingham dress, very simple and unornamented, which Egan thought was very becoming to her.

"*Good* morning," he said, cheerfully.

"Oh — good *morning*." Her return of the courtesy was shy. "Did you — want anything?"

Egan's smile was far-reaching. "Are you the lady of the house, then?"

"Oh, no," she said, in a tone to reprove the sacrilege. "That's Mrs. McCain. I'm *Miss* McCain."

He bowed to it. "I'm glad to meet you. I'm Lieutenant Egan . . . er . . . no, that was last week. Mister Egan this week."

"Oh!" she cried. "Really?" Her eyes were wider yet as she absorbed the number of his decorations. "Why, you used to *own* this place, didn't you?"

Egan winced. "My father did. And now I'll be satisfied with one small room in it. That is, I want to live here again if I can. Do you happen to know if it's possible?"

"I'm sure it is," she said breathlessly. He gathered that she was almost always breathless. "I know it is. But, how on earth did you get here so early in the morning?"

"Oh, I stayed last night with Mr. Jones."

"Oh, yes." She came a few steps nearer to him. "I've heard *so* much about you, Lieutenant Egan. . . . I used to see you sometimes, too, when I was a little bit

of a girl, and you were in high-school . . . you don't remember me, of course —"

"Oh, of course I do," Egan perjured himself magnificently; and had his reward in her inspired blushes. "I remember you just as well —"

"Honestly?"

"I might not have remembered your name, but I certainly do remember *you*."

There was no answer available to her. Eventually, she had to fall back on business.

"And you — you honestly do want to come and have a room in our house?"

"More than I want anything else I can think of, Miss McCain. My own room, too, if I can have it. It's to your left at the top of the stairs."

Hero-worship shone in her eyes; and there was also a spark of some other emotion. "There's no one in it now — of course you can have it. And that makes six," she said.

"Six — guests?"

"Yes. You and Mr. Jones and Mr. Adams and Mr. Pennypacker and Mr. Wilson and Mr. Ganzenberry. He's an artist. Oh, he paints beautifully!"

"But six isn't a houseful," said Egan. "Not unless the house has shrunk."

"Oh, no." She gazed for a moment at the ground. "We counted on sixteen. We've only had the house four weeks, though. But if more people don't come pretty soon. . . ."

"Hm," said Egan. "How much are you charging?"

"Fifteen dollars." She said it breathlessly.

"Regardless of what room it is?"

"Why, yes."

"Suppose two men room together?"

"Why, we thought fifteen dollars would be fair for everybody."

"You've not been at this business very long, have you?"

"No," she said, averted. "No."

Egan was sorry for her. "You'll have to work out a better system than that," he said kindly. "It sounds fair, but it really isn't. Not businesslike."

"We don't know *any*thing about business," she told him shamefacedly. "You see . . . we never did anything like this before . . . but when our lawyer made a bad investment for us —" She broke off there, and stared at him in an embarrassment of fear that she had said too much. It was the stare which presently enlightened Egan.

"Oh!" he said. "Was your lawyer, by any chance, Mr. Macklin?"

She nodded, speechless.

"And he bought Egan Company stock for you and your mother?"

Again she nodded.

"Do you happen to know what it's worth today?" It was his first encounter with one of that group which, in reaching for the great bargain, had suffered entire loss, and he was very uncomfortable about it. He wondered how many of the group would feel that he was in some measure responsible, simply by virtue of being in the Egan family.

"N-nothing," she said, hushed. "So Mother and I rented this house from the Hospital,— Mr. Macklin fixed it up for us. As long as they had to rent it to somebody, and it had been your house, and we'd lost all our money in your company, they made it a low rent, so —"

"How much stock have you got — if it's not an impertinence?"

"I . . . M-mother never told me."

Egan drew a long breath. Macklin had told part truth, at least.

"Tell me," he said, "when I can see your mother."

She came impulsively nearer yet, and her eyes were gorgeously brilliant. "You . . . you're not . . . you're not going to buy it back!" she faltered. "Oh, Lieutenant Egan! If you only *would!*" She was highly excited, and excitation gave her cheeks a charm not wasted on Egan. "If you *only* — would do that! It would . . . why, it would be the bravest thing you've *ever* done. The noblest. The . . . the *best.*"

The corners of his mouth went upward. She was a silly little thing,— so intense, so dramatic.

"I don't know that I could do that, exactly, but could I see your mother before breakfast?"

Impulsively she snatched his hand. "*Come!*" said Miss McCain, with abandon.

After a somewhat staccato interview on other matters, Mrs. McCain, a timid lady with recessive manners, had looked hurriedly into Egan's face, then fixedly at Egan's feet, and told him that the room was his. Thereafter, she had made several false starts, and

finally said, as though uncertain of her own administration: "You'd better come in to breakfast, now."

Her daughter was more efficient. "Why, mother! Nobody's rung the gong yet."

Mrs. McCain grew pink (in the presence of Egan) and prim (in reproof of her offspring). "Thank you, Milly. I was just about to." She retraced her steps to the foot of the stairs, and with absorbed precision, performed for a moment upon the chimes. "Now we can go in," she said imperially, but she wasn't sure even then whether she ought to precede Egan or let him precede her.

She took her stand at the head of the table, and assumed a misplaced air of authority. "Will you sit there, Lieutenant Egan?"

"Mother! That's Mr. Adams' place!"

Mrs. McCain smoothed out the salient of her mouth. "He won't be down. Georgina's taking up a tray. . . . Oh, good morning, Mr. Pennypacker. Permit me to make you acquainted with Lieutenant Egan."

Mr. Pennypacker, a short, impersonal, middle-aged statistician, emitted a burst of utterly unaccented laughter. This, as it soon appeared, was merely a sort of vocal punctuation; it meant nothing overt. "Pleased to meet you."

"Shall we all sit down?"

Mr. Pennypacker transfixed Egan with his bright little eyes.

"Are you out of the service yet, sir?"

"I was discharged Monday, at Mineola, Mr. Pennypacker."

"Then you'll have to excuse me if I don't call you

'Lieutenant,' Mr. Egan. No offence, sir. I always like to be accurate."

"Oh, they often call people titles afterwards!" interposed Millicent. "General Grant, Colonel Roosevelt —"

"What would you like for eggs, Lieutenant Egan? Fried, or boiled?"

"Fried, please."

Mr. Pennypacker was unabashed. "I see you have the *Croix de Guerre*, Mr. Egan. Did you know that only four hundred and seventy-nine American officers are entitled to wear that decoration?"

"No; I —"

"Mr. *Wilson*, permit me to make you acquainted with Lieutenant Egan."

"Ouch! Howdy-do, Lieutenant." Mr. Wilson came all the way around the table to give Egan a putty-like grip.

"Sleep well, Wilson?" Mr. Pennypacker winked at Egan.

"No, I can't say I did. I judge I slept about three hours. Tried it on my right side 'til I heard the clock strike twelve, and then I tried it on my left side 'til I heard it strike one, and then I got up and read a little Greek until half past two."

"He reads Greek," said Mr. Pennypacker to Egan, very humorously. "Perhaps you do, too."

"Oh, I might remember a few words," laughed Egan.

Mr. Wilson glared at Mr. Pennypacker. "You don't need to make me out a fool. I said a *little* Greek."

"I bet it was. How about some coffee, Milly."

"Mr. *Jones*, permit me to —"

"Oh, we know each other! How's the boy, Bronson? Sort of hot, isn't it?"

"Mr. *Ganzenberry*, permit me to make you acquainted with Lieutenant Egan."

"Good morning, everybody. . . . Glad to see you, sir. Any relation of Charles C. Egan of Philadelphia?" The artist shook hands warmly. "I knew Charles C. Egan very well indeed. A brother artist. No relation at all? I'm sorry. . . . Sleep well, Wilson?"

"Of course he didn't," said Mr. Pennypacker, with another burst of laughter. "What's the use of asking that every morning?" He turned to address Little Johnny Jones. "It may seem hot to *you*, but I've kept a diary for twenty-nine years, and my own personal impression is that this is as cool a July, on the average, as we've ever had. I'll look that up and —"

"Please don't bother," said Johnny, hastily. "I'll take your word for it."

"Oh, it won't be any trouble at all. I'm interested, now you've brought up the subject. If you'll just wait half a second —"

"Sit down, Pennypacker," advised the artist. "When are you going to learn not to spring the book on people? We'll all take your word for it."

"Georgina, pass Lieutenant Egan the toast. . . . Oh, don't take that burned piece! Georgina, get Lieutenant Egan some fresh toast."

"Oh!" said Mr. Wilson, explosively. "Are you James Egan's son?"

"Yes."

There was a rather noticeable pause.

"What do you think's going to happen in Russia, Mr. Pennypacker?"

"I'll tell you, Wilson —" And Mr. Pennypacker was as good as his word.

Egan, who was placed between Mrs. McCain and her daughter, wished that he were sitting next to Jones. He hadn't liked that sudden quiet when his identity was announced. So far, he was of course ignorant of public sentiment regarding the Egan failure. He didn't know whether he was personally pitied, or personally blamed — or what was generally thought about his father. He wondered if Johnny's forecast of last night was to be applied to all Plainfield.

"Marmalade, Lieutenant?"

"There's always some kind of a war or another," Pennypacker was saying. "International, civil, race, wage, class — I don't care what you call it; there's always something. And during every war, there's bolshevism. Now to go on to the next point —"

Mr. Wilson addressed Egan across the table. "Hear what he's saying? He says the war isn't over yet."

"More butter, Lieutenant Egan?"

"I said," affirmed Mr. Pennypacker, "— if you'll do me the honour to quote me correctly — I said that *the* war isn't over; *a* war is over. Mr. Egan hasn't come back from *the* war; he's come back from *war* — or from *a* war. Now he's ready to engage in some other kind of war. I use the word in its broad sense, Wilson. I'm not a quibbler. Mr. Egan, or any of the rest of us, can't get out of it. War doesn't necessarily mean

simply artillery, and horses and guns and . . . and so forth. It can mean commercial struggle. It can mean society. It can mean 'most anything."

"So can you, Pennypacker. . . . Cream, Georgina."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. McCain, "we're all of us constantly striving, if that's what you mean."

"For instance, the temporary check in Mr. Egan's career — something we all look upon, sir, as a great shame and a great misfortune — why, isn't that comparable as a mere incident in his life to, say, McClellan's failure before Richmond? If you stretch your imagination —"

"Not as far as from here to Richmond," observed Mr. Ganzenberry, dryly.

"No, but seriously. What is life but a continuous campaign? War against inertia. War against poverty. War against sickness. War against competitors. War against your own nature. Do I make myself clear?"

He had; and he had also succeeded in placing a stiletto in the secret sensibilities of every one present, so that there was no immediate rejoinder.

To Egan, however, his grandiloquence sounded prophetic. Life was nothing but a continuous campaign. Not *the* war; but *a* war.

"If you don't see what you want, Lieutenant Egan, I do hope you'll make yourself perfectly at home, and ask for it."

But it wasn't until after breakfast that the instability of Egan's position began to affect him. Stanley Adams, pale but resolute, had dropped in for a mo-

ment, and departed for the office of the *Times;* Little Johnny Jones had made haste to report at his insurance agency; the other boarders had their appointed tasks, and went to face them; Egan was adrift.

As a preliminary to action, he smoked a long cigar in Jones' room. There was no use in glooming over his situation; it was too present a reality. Besides, every one would expect him to be dazed by it, and that was exactly the reason why he refused to be. Obviously, if he didn't care to become anybody's employé, he must originate some means of living independently. He told himself that he wasn't snobbish; he merely didn't like the idea of going to work on the same basis as those who hadn't had all Egan's advantages. Of course, if anybody would pay him what he was really worth, that might be safer than launching out alone. Without prejudice, he catalogued his various abilities, setting them down mentally as though he were framing an advertisement for the "Situations Wanted" column of Adams' newspaper.

"Young man, recently discharged from the Army, desires employment in any clean and rather exclusive business which promises to make a great success, which it will generously share with him. Age 25, college graduate, best of health. No experience in anything except spending money to get the least return from it, and in piloting various types of airplanes. Salary desired to start —"

Egan totalled his requirements. Room and board, fifteen dollars. Incidentals, fifteen dollars. Everything else, forty dollars. That was his idea of the irreducible minimum. Seventy dollars a week. His own

modesty rather appealed to him. Why, his Army pay, counting in the extra-duty allowance for flying, had amounted almost to that much. But, on the subject of airplanes —

Egan reached for a sheet of paper, and began to set down rapid figures. His eyes grew brilliant, and his cigar went out, unheeded. He was himself, again.

At ten o'clock, he put on his cap, and went down to see the Honourable George Perkins.

"Well, sir!" said the Judge. "How've you capitalized your time since I last saw you?"

"I've found out something about the Egan Company, anyway; and I've got a scheme."

"So soon? Who from? Not about the scheme just yet — the Company."

"From a Mrs. McCain. She's a widow. She was one of the people who let Eddie Macklin buy Egan stock, Uncle George. Her husband left her fifty thousand. Eddie was her lawyer, and managed her finances. He bought fifty for her. She's the one who's rented our old house on Vine Street from the City Hospital, and she's taking boarders. I'm going to live there."

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes. . . . That's all I could get out of her. She seems to have the idea in her head that she mustn't talk about it. Pride, I guess. She's very . . . genteel. Only it's some relief to know Eddie doesn't lie *all* the time."

"It is. Well, I told you I didn't think that he lied this time. . . . What's your scheme?"

Egan's chest expanded. "First, I want you to give me desk-room here — free, gratis, for nothing."

"It's yours — telephone and all. What's next?"

"I want you to come and take a room at 1630 Vine. Your old room's empty, Uncle George. I'm back in mine, and it feels great. It'll please me a lot to have you there. Uncle Stanley's there, too. Will you?"

The Judge's fist bumped on the desk.

"By gum, I will! It's the only mantelpiece I ever saw was just the right height, without scorching my shins in the winter time."

"That's bully. Now, where are the personal things Dad left me? And all my old clothes and everything? I want to get out of this uniform as soon as I can."

"In storage, Bronson. I'll order 'em sent up to the house this morning, so they'll be there tonight. Now sit down there and tell me what your scheme's all about."

"Well — there's no sense in figuring on anything coming to me out of the Company, is there?"

"Not that I can see. In the long run, there may be something left over, but it's not worth banking on."

"And there isn't any job there for me?"

"No. There isn't."

"That's how I doped it out, myself. So I've either got to go get a job with somebody else, or start something of my own, haven't I?"

"No disputing that, Bronson."

"All right; I've got a scheme. All I need is five thousand dollars to put me on my feet."

The Judge whistled.

"Five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and don't you try to loan it to me, either. I'll take desk room from you, and that's all I will take.

I'm going to earn it by the middle of August. Then I'm out for bear."

"How'll you earn it?"

Egan was very optimistic. "One of the best friends I've got — we used to be clubmates at college — is vice-president of an airplane factory up in New York State. I'm going to get him to sell me a J N 4 H — that's an advanced training plane — on time."

"Well?"

"And then," said Bronson cheerfully, "I'm going to get a concession at the County Fair — and if the calendar hasn't shifted in the meantime, that's the middle of September — and I'm going to take up passengers at a dollar a minute. Plainfield hasn't seen much of any flying, and practically nobody here ever had a ride, and it ought to go big. Like the idea?"

The Judge scowled. "Not very dignified, Bronson."

"Neither is being broke."

"They'll say you're deliberately going out of your way just to be theatrical —"

"No, only spectacular. And I want the money, and I want the publicity."

"You won't have much caste left, will you?"

"I'm not worried about that, Uncle George."

"Well, suppose you make as much money as you think you will, then what'll you do?"

"Aërial transportation," said Egan boldly. "There's no use in denying it — it's the coming business. I've figured it all out. It isn't guesswork; I know what I'm talking about. We can get any number of good pilots — there were seventeen thousand of 'em

when the war ended. We can buy ships anywhere — the country's full of them. People laugh — but did you ever read Booth Tarkington's book called 'The Magnificent Ambersons'? People laughed at the automobile the same way. I want to start an aërial express between here and Dayton. Start with the H — it'll carry a couple of hundred pounds after it's fixed over a little — and then add more, and then branch out. Then to Cleveland, and Cincinnati, and Chicago. They're doing it in England already. The mail service works pretty well, doesn't it? Well, why shouldn't we go ahead and be pioneers in the express business?"

The Judge emphasized his remarks with his corncob. "It's impractical, boy! And even if it wasn't, you're not old enough. You haven't had any business training at all! You're making the same mistake you always did — thinking you can do anything anybody else could!"

"Well, that makes one more reason why I won't let you loan me any money, then, Uncle George, if you think that way. I'll only risk my own — if I make any."

"But you can't get franchises on a thing like that! You can't buy a right-of-way. Anybody with more money or more brains could come along and put you out of business in half a second."

"I guess I can look out for that. . . . Don't forget, Uncle George, the world isn't going to sleep . . . the Government's planning to use the Air Service in forestry work, and coast and geodetic surveying, and —"

"But I hate to have you risk so much on so little prospect, Bronson."

"Would you rather have me go to work in a shoe-store on ten dollars a week."

"No, but . . . I don't like this County Fair scheme. You might get hurt. And I don't suppose you can get insurance. . . . Pshaw!" The Judge laughed guiltily. "I forgot you haven't anybody to be a beneficiary. Somehow I usually think of you as married. . . ."

"Just a minute!" said Egan sharply. His forehead was deeply lined with wrinkles. Presently he drew a long breath, and sat up. "Uncle George, you're right — even Lloyd's didn't care to insure fliers. But the records show that at the American flying fields — it wouldn't be fair to drag in the records abroad — there was only one fatality for every *hundred and ninety-four thousand hours' flying*, and three quarters of 'em were caused by stunting at low altitudes. Now . . . what would you say to a company to write aërial insurance *only;* injuries to fliers and passengers; damages to express; damages to farms or buildings or individuals from crashes. . . ." He paused, dazzled by his own thoughts. "It hasn't been done — not that I know of — and there's money in it. Not millions, of course, but . . . think of what you could collect by writing insurance per passenger per trip? There'll be a hundred thousand people in the air this next year. Curiosity seekers. Everybody's crazy to go up. Would a man pay ten dollars, say, for a five thousand dollar policy on a ten minute flip? I rather guess he would!"

The Judge sat hypnotized.

"You're so visionary, Bronson! Get down to earth — get down to common sense."

"And Professor Langley was hooted into his grave — and ten years later they took his old original machine up to Keuka Lake and *flew* it."

"You can't count on those infernal things to —"

"They won the war, didn't they? And they've made transatlantic trips, haven't they? And they're carrying mail for the Post Office Department, aren't they?"

The Judge filled his pipe unsteadily.

"Are you serious about all this, Bronson?"

"Absolutely."

"Suppose it fails?"

"How can it?" inquired Egan, with dignity.

"You can't run both enterprises at one time."

"I wouldn't have to. I've got a man in mind for the insurance end."

"Who's that?"

"Little Johnny Jones. Best man in town."

The Judge was cumulatively depressed.

"I know him. He's a nice young fellow, and they say he's a hard worker,— but, Bronson, you can't expect to go out with a couple of playmates, and compete with insurance companies and express companies! You'd better think this over some more. You're jumping too fast. Of course, I know you're all stirred up, and no wonder, but you don't have to go off on a wild tangent like this, just to make a start. Take a couple days off to get acclimated, and then we'll sit down and go over things, logically."

Egan held his tongue, but it took will-power.

"Well — when can I have my desk-room?"

"You can pick it out now."

"Thank you, Uncle George. I'll look around a bit, and let you know."

"Here! You're too quick on the trigger! Where you going?"

"Why," said Egan, surprisedly, "I'm going to find a good place for my desk, and then I'm going over to talk to Uncle Stanley about what sort of publicity we'd need when — I mean if — we start this thing."

The Judge bit his lip. "Just to please me, Bronson —"

"But it won't do any harm to talk it over with him, will it?"

The Judge swallowed. He looked at Egan, and looked away, uneasily.

"No," he said in an undertone. "That is, I hope it won't. But, Bronson —"

"Yes?"

The Judge motioned feebly.

"Nothing. . . . Go on."

IX

SHE was dressed quietly enough, but with a certain style which made most other women feel like part of the background; and as she came out from the swinging doors of Plainfield's leading department store she radiated an alert independence which again distinguished her from the herd of chronic conservatives marching before and behind her. She was a size or two smaller than the current standard of débutantes, or even the current standard of post-débutantes, but she had a magnificent figure, and carried herself like a member of the King's Own Rifles. She walked with a healthy swing — not a swagger, but a swing — designed to take her from one place to another by the shortest measured distance, and at the least drain on the clock. Finally, she was good-looking in the most inclusive sense; not superficially attractive, but with that particular sort of intrinsic sweetness which belongs only to a lovable disposition, and can't be imitated.

Under the circumstances, it was inevitable that Bronson Egan should catch his breath. "Miss Henderson!" he said, with almost an apology in his salutation. With the memory of last night, and of her parentage, vivid in his mind, he couldn't decide whether he was glad or sorry to meet her.

She stopped, and met him with frank pleasure. "Lieutenant Egan!"

"I've been thinking about you," he said soberly.

"So have I. . . . Are you walking my way?"

Egan, with her smile warming him, knew that he was glad.

"Yes," he said promptly; and she laughed outright.

"But you don't even know yet which way it is!"

"It makes no difference," said Egan. "It's mine, too."

He was glad to see her, and he felt that he owed her a great deal, but the fact that she was Martin Henderson's daughter wouldn't down. They traversed half a block in silence.

"That was a very courageous thing for you to do last night," she said abruptly.

"To take poor old Uncle Stanley Adams home? Why was it?"

"It . . . created a wrong impression. It was bound to, and you knew it. He's not accepted here, and you're not afraid to be kind to him. Mary said she'd already warned you that people would criticize you for being friendly to him. I call it mighty brave."

"I'm not positive about that," said Egan awkwardly. "When men drink too much, their friends have to look out for them. I'm his friend whether he's sober or not. He needs me more when he's not. That's all."

"The difficulty comes in the friendship, Lieutenant."

Egan was alert. "Some people always exaggerate those things. I can be his friend without following the same line of conduct, can't I?"

"I'm almost sorry for the friendship itself — because he's anything but a friend of my father's. . . . He's written some terrible things about him in the *Times*."

Egan made no answer. The sunlight threatened to fade out of his world.

"It was courageous, just the same," she said. "And as a matter of fact, if I hadn't seen you doing the same thing yesterday afternoon, I mightn't have said all I did to you last night."

Egan wasn't unpleased. "Would you mind if I asked you a personal question, Miss Henderson? What were you doing all through the war?"

She glanced at him in some perplexity.

"I don't exactly see the connection —"

"There is one, though."

"Why," she said, "I was a sort of teamster for the first part of it, and then I was a chauffeur."

"I beg your pardon — a teamster, did you say?"

"Teamster," she repeated. "Life was nothing but one drive after another, and I was one of the drivers. Red Cross, Liberty Loan, War Camp, War Savings, Y. M. C. A., and then the United War Work — the only thing I wasn't in was a drive to raise money to relieve the people who'd bankrupted themselves in all the other drives. And then I went into that Woman's Motor Corps, you know, and drove an ambulance. I suppose you could even call me 'Sergeant' if you wanted to." She laughed merrily. "It wasn't like being overseas, of course, but sometimes it was pretty lively, especially during the flu epidemic, and twice when we had big explosions. I had a wonderful old 'bus; Hawkins — she was our Major, and an awfully good sport, too, even if she *was* an old maid — Hawkins said I had everything in it but lace curtains and a fireless cooker."

Egan managed to laugh also; the sunlight was growing brighter. He hadn't actually believed that she was as unpatriotic as her father; but now that he had her own statement, he was relieved.

"I suspect you've kept yourself busy, anyway."

"Once I was on duty for twenty-seven hours straight," she said. "It was a fire." She looked at him sidewise. "The idea of my running on like that, when you've done something real!"

"I haven't done so much — no more for me, probably, than you have for you."

She observed that this was intended primarily as a compliment, and not as insincerity.

"Nonsense! Why, you've flown an airplane, haven't you? Most of the men around here haven't gumption enough to fly a toy balloon."

"Looking back on it, it makes me feel like a high-class taxi-driver."

"Oh, don't be silly!" said Miss Henderson sturdily. "I know what's the matter with you — you're all tired out nervously, that's all. And I know why, too. The let-down's too much for you. You're tuned up to high C, and the rest of the world's in low B flat. I felt the same way when we demobilized. All I could seem to want to do was to find somebody sort of harmless, and cooing and squshy, and sit back and rest my mind and let him sort of prattle at me for awhile. I know just how you feel."

Egan was convulsed. "So you think I need that sort of treatment, do you?"

"You probably do," she said. "Just a good old-fashioned sociable session with some nice little harm-

less vampire, or else just the opposite — lots of action. Tennis and swimming and everything. They're the only two ways I know to get over the blues. I meant to tell you that last night. It's a prescription."

"Oh!" said Egan. "I'm astonished at you."

"Are you? Why?"

"It doesn't seem like you to suggest that."

"Why not?"

"Because in every other way you've been so practical."

Her smile was this time more comprehensive.

"You do need a teacher. Don't you know that you must never, never, *never* tell a girl she's practical, whether you think so or not? It simply isn't done. But between ourselves, don't you think that's practical? I do."

"It's impossible," said Egan shortly.

"It seems to me I've heard you used to be rather a success at it."

"That was before the war."

"The war didn't change you so much, did it?"

"It turned me inside out," said Egan, "and there isn't any girl-sense or any game-sense left in me."

She came to a tardy standstill. "I'm leaving you here, Lieutenant; I do hope you'll remember to come to see me. My father came to town yesterday, and I'll probably go home with him the end of the week. . . . But it isn't impractical. I know it isn't. Won't you just give up your ideas of logic for once, and believe me without trying?"

"You think it's sound reasoning?"

"No," she said with a cheery smile, "but it gener-

ally works. And you come to see me sometime, and I'll cheer you up so you could flirt with a broom-handle. All it needs is a heart and a sense of humour. Good-bye, Lieutenant."

For a moment or two, Egan loitered at the corner, contemplative. At length he came to himself, and with a little start of perception realized that he had halted squarely before the *Times* building. The occasion was propitious; so that he went up into the business office, and inquired the whereabouts of Mr. Stanley Adams.

"Third floor rear," said the cashier smartly. "Take elevator left."

Obediently, Egan took elevator left, and emerged from it into the apotheosis of disorder. The limited floor space was crammed with ancient typewriters on rickety tables, with heaps of sooty newspapers, soap-boxes filled with cuts, heaps of electros with dried ink encrusting them, files and files innumerable. Life was at extremes here; men either dawdled or rushed; impertinent small boys sat playing "jeff" with em-quads or plunged at top speed down narrow alleys between the desks. The atmosphere was aquiver with suppressed energy; the *Times*, an early morning and an early afternoon paper, was on the verge of going to press. This was that portion of the day during which the majority of the staff earned their salaries.

Egan, thrice directed and re-directed, ended at a cubicle some eight feet by ten, containing a heavily nicked-and-scarred desk, a cane-seated chair, a typewriter, a hundred pounds of accumulated dust, and Mr. Stanley Adams, who was in his shirt-sleeves, a cigar

slanted in his mouth at the proper angle to keep the smoke out of his eyes, pecking dreamily at the machine.

"Hello, Uncle Stanley."

Adams bounced erect.

"Hello, boy." He seemed to have some difficulty in meeting Egan's eyes. "How's your good health?"

"Bully. . . . Am I interrupting you?"

"Not so you could notice it."

"Writing an editorial?"

"Not just now." He squinted unfavourably at the cigar. "Fact is, Bronson, I'm a sort of general utility man. I'm an expert expert. I'm doing a review of the art show at the Municipal Art Museum."

Egan had known that the man was versatile, but this was news.

"I didn't know you're an art critic, Uncle Stanley."

"Hey? Art critic! I'm an everything-critic. On a newspaper you don't learn to be an expert — they appoint you one. I hear it's a good exhibition, too."

"Haven't you seen it?" demanded Egan.

"Me? *Seen it?* Gone 'way over there to rub elbows with a lot of whiskers and rubber at a lot of pictures? Catch a weasel asleep! I got a program. How's this — most of it's quoted from an artist who used to be a friend of mine,— Bob Chambers — but it's hot stuff. 'The portrait of Rudolf Ganzenberry, by himself,—'"

"Hello! Is that the one who's up at our house?"

"The same one. Listen. 'is more than a self-painting; it is cosmic autobiography. One can con-

ceivably be an artist with one's own self for canvas and medium both. To this extent, Mr. Ganzenberry has achieved the impossible. To be an artist is not necessarily egoism, nor is it always calculation. It may imply such spontaneity as a man might display in relating, without self-consciousness, his own personal experiences to a group of friends, and unwittingly revealing to them his inward self, while he thought only to regale them with a cross-section of his most outward and least important emotions. So it is with Mr. Ganzenberry's canvas.' "

"Holy Smoke!" said Egan.

"'But to those who feel that this portrait is insufficiently realistic, it should be said that it is the mistake of the crowd to regard art merely as the interpretation of experience. Such interpretation is the cross-section of the eternal, and not the standard of truth. It is ontology, but it is not life. Art, in its larger sense, had nothing to do with life. Life tends to claim all for itself; and therefore tends to kill art. In other words, life claims art, and art does not claim life. For if this were not so, art would be unexpressed, and art *is* the revelation of the undetermined, which can only reach its fulness in the quietude of the soul — such quietude as that in which Mr. Ganzenberry evidently painted this picture, which —' "

"And you never saw it!" breathed Egan, aghast.

"'Which also is framed suitably to the unusual subject,' " finished Adams, with a grotesque smirk. "There, by God! That's genius!"

"Do you mean to tell me that the public'll stand for that?"

"The ones who ever read the art column anyway'll lap it up," said Adams. "Because they won't know what it means. Neither do I. Neither does Chambers. But I've actually seen that particular picture; Ganzenberry showed it to me. It looks like the Cheshire cat after it had disappeared."

Laughingly, Egan shook hands. "All right. Now that you've got all that poison out of your system — and you ought to feel a heap better — tell me how many columns I can get free in the *Times?*"

"What about?"

"Me."

"Plain puff — or what?"

"Plain puff," said Egan. "Hundred per cent. blurb."

"Why, 'most any amount, I guess. That is, if you give me time enough ahead. I can manufacture news out of 'most anything."

"Would it be news if I should take the prettiest girl in Plainfield up for a twenty minute jazz in an airplane on the opening day of the County Fair?"

"You bet!" said Adams, animatedly. "You bet! Anything in it?"

"Then you'd better put a fresh ribbon in your typewriter, Uncle Stanley. . . . One thing more; would you care to get out of the newspaper business?"

Adams chewed his cigar. "There's only two kinds of men in the newspaper game, Bronson. One kind plans to get out of it as soon as it's saved enough money. The other kind's resigned to it only because it knows it never *will* save enough money. I'm in Class II."

"Would a hundred dollars a week tempt you?"

"Tempt me! It'd paralyse me! What multi-millionaire done that?"

"Then get ready to leave here the fifteenth of September, Uncle Stanley. The Ohio Aërial Transport Company's going to want you."

"The *what?*"

Egan repeated it, sonorously.

"But — as what? What capacity? Who's the —"

"Press agent — advertising manager."

Adams leaned forward; his forehead was wrinkled and his eyes narrowed.

"Are you kidding me, Bronson?"

"Do I look it?"

"No. But tell me some more about it, Bronson."

"I can't. Not quite yet. But it's the real thing — no joking. If you want to get out of here, I can get you out. With good prospects — good ones. George Perkins and myself are going to start the first aërial express company in the Middle West. And I want some publicity to get us started right."

The journalist stared at Egan; suddenly jerked his head forward. "Then I'm with you, Bronson. If you've made up your mind to try yourself out on your own, and you think you need me, I'll come. Whenever you say so. Just let me know eight days ahead, so I can give a week's notice. Then I'm yours."

Egan was now on the verge of his most difficult conversion.

"The only thing about it, Uncle Stanley — I hardly know how to get at this —"

"Oh!" Adams' cheeks went dull red. "Oh!

Don't say a word, Bronson. . . ." He lighted a match to rekindle the cigar; Egan noted that his hands were very unsteady. "That's something I'd really rather not discuss — just now — if you don't mind. I'll tell you sometime. It'll be all right. Take it for granted, will you?"

"Very well." Egan, too, was relieved. "Only —"

"I know, boy. Just wait a little — I'll tell you. It's all right. It's all right." Which, of course, was merely the common method of expressing what both of them understood — that it wasn't.

It was dusk when Egan reached his boarding-house, formerly his home, and he was tired. In the lower hallway, he passed Miss McCain, who venerated him with her eyes, and plainly showed that a little brief conversation would flatter her; but Egan didn't pause, not even to tell her that he had snared Judge Perkins as another client. He climbed the stairs wearily, and went into his room, closed the door and, as an afterthought, locked it. There was no necessity of this; no likelihood of interruption; he merely desired to intensify his solitude; for the consciousness of his poverty was suddenly heavy upon him, and he was very downcast and downhearted. He tossed his cap idly on the bed, and sat down.

The room was obstructed by a dozen trunks and packing-boxes; it was more barn-like than ever. He told himself, idly, that he should have to waste a precious lot of time to overhaul all that luggage, and make the place habitable. He doubted if he cared enough about it to do the work. He doubted if he cared about

anything, anyway. So many men of his age, so much less deserving, so much less competent to enjoy good fortune — had it. It looked as though life, after all, were a matter of luck.

He had taken four old friends, including little Johnny Jones, to lunch at the Plainfield House, and the check had amounted to fourteen dollars and seventy cents. He had given the waiter two dollars. It was damnable that a man should have to think of these things. Yet in his present state of finances, he couldn't help thinking about it. He who had spent money like water when he was a college undergraduate, had now a matter of eighteen hundred dollars between himself and the ultimate zero; and he would unquestionably have to spend fifteen out of the eighteen on the preliminaries of his venture. Pretty soon, he might actually have to borrow. . . .

Of course, if all his plans came nicely to fruition, he would be rich again. And they were clever plans, too. His own. But he couldn't possibly spread two hundred and twenty dollars over two months. It was damnable!

A white envelope, propped against an ornamental candle-stick on his bureau, attracted his attention, and wearily he edged between two trunks to reach it. The Kents' stationery. Probably a note from Mrs. Kent. To thank him, no doubt, for his preservation of the peace at her house-warming dance.

"Dear Bronson:

"In spite of everything, I'm asking you to come over after dinner tonight, because Martha's going home

Saturday, and she likes you. Father gets in from Washington at five. We won't mention last night to anybody. Please don't ever speak of it to mother. I don't believe I'll ever forgive you, but I'm willing to give you one more chance to see if you know how to behave.

"M."

Egan read the note twice. He replaced the missive in its envelope, unlocked the door, and stepped around to Little Johnny Jones' room.

Little Johnny Jones was there, reading the *Times*, and chuckling over the art column.

"Sorry," said Egan, "but I can't spend the evening with you after all, old top."

"Why, don't apologize to me, Bronson. You were the one suggested it."

"I know; I had some business to talk over with you. But it's all off. I'm going somewhere else."

"Going lady-killing?"

"Going to be lady-killed," said Egan. "I'm going over to call on the Kents. And say! I may have to ask you for a couple of things, Johnny. My trunks are here, and I'm going to put on cits. But I don't know what there is, and —"

"I'll lend you anything you need from a shoe-horn to a scarf-pin, Bronson."

"Thanks," said Egan. "But I don't think I'll have to ask you for a scarf-pin, Johnny. I've got one."

X

THE laird of the manor of Kent (one of the oldest and most honourable manors in all the county, for the present laird's father had bought the land quite sixty years ago, when Plainfield had only a fourth-class postoffice) was the type of gentleman who, if you had met him for half a dozen minutes, would have left you confident that he was a citizen of great importance in his own community, and not to be sneezed at elsewhere. This confidence, however, he would have engendered not by what he actually said, or even intimated, but rather by what he withheld. He was a stoutish gentleman of passing fifty, pleasant to look at when his mood was pleasant, and not an adversary to be ignored. He smiled much, and talked little, but he had the air of a man accustomed to dictatorship, and few could overlook it.

If you had hunted up his patronymic in *Who's Who*, you would have found precisely the kind of biography you would have expected.

KENT, G(eorge) Willoughby, capitalist; *b.* Plainfield, O., Feb. 21, 1865; s. Ephraim and Mary G. (Bosworth) K.; ed. Plainfield pub. sch.; A.B. Knox coll., Ill., 1887, A.M., Wooster U., 1908, LL.D., Knox, 1914; *m.* Estelle Rogers of Plainfield, O., Aug. 5, 1889. Entered employ Am. Express Co., Plainfield, O., 1888, Plainfield Savings Bank 1890, Plainfield Machine Co. 1893. Purchased control of Central Machine Co., 1895. Organized Kent Manufacturing Co. by consol.

several small corporations 1898, pres. since organization. Pres. Plainfield Lt. and Power Co. 1899–1917, when sold to municipality. Also pres. Plainfield Gear Co. Dir. Citizens Trust Co. of Plainfield, Plainfield Savings Bank, Plainfield Motor Car Co., County Telephone Co., Wood Products Co., Interurban Elec. Rys., Plainfield Hotel Co., Electric Foundry Co., Egan Co., High Speed Steel Co. Trustee Plainfield City Hosp. Governor Plainfield Country Club, Metropolitan Club. County chmn. Am. Red Cross. Comd. Lt. Col. Q.M.O.R.C., July 3, 1917. Col., Q.M.C., U.S.A. May 6, 1918. Mem. Am. Chem. Soc., Soc. Automotive Engrs., A.I.E.E., Am. Soc. Mech. E., S.A.R., etc. Republican. Episcopalian. *Clubs.* Metropolitan, Citizens, Fortnightly, Plainfield Country, all of Plainfield, O. *Home:* 1404 Vine St., Plainfield, O.

The laird of the manor was standing before the living-room fireplace, his feet well apart, his hands clasped behind him, very much after the manner of the English hunting squires whose descendant he was quietly proud to be. He had hurried out of uniform several hours ago, but in his rough cheviot suit, he still looked military, and commanding, and was perhaps secretly conscious of it. Mr. Kent was by way of being a kindly autocrat, but in the present moment, he faced a representative of autocracy such as he himself, lacking the proper ancestry, had never practised. Having known Old Man Egan in his prime, Mr. Kent wasn't wholly overjoyed to come to argument with Old Man Egan's son. He found himself wishing that, under the circumstances, Egan had come in his Lieutenant's uniform, and he himself had worn the silver eagles of his

colonelcy. It would have established their relative authority so much the clearer.

Unable to compete with Egan on purely technical grounds, he sought refuge, at length, in commercial generalities, where he was more at home.

"But civil aërial transportation?" he repeated. "Well, now, I don't know about that."

The two girls, who had been equally startled by Egan's declaration of his intentions, also looked as though they didn't know about it. "Oh, what a perfectly wild idea," said Mary, indulgently.

Mr. Kent gave her a military nod of approval.

"When you talk about the airplane as a military necessity, I can't debate with you. But when you talk about it as a peace-time method of transportation, I'm entitled to an opinion. I've been connected with transportation companies for twenty years or more. It may be done; I don't say it won't. It may make money; I dare say it will, sometime. But I don't know that I'd advise any young man to make his first business plunge in such an uncertain field. Of course, I can see the possibilities, Bronson, but my advice is to let it alone. Leave it to somebody with more money to lose, and more experience to cash in on."

Egan was respectfully on the offensive. "What would you suggest my doing, then?"

Mr. Kent was now in his favourite status — that of a gratuitous counsellor. "Why, if I were in your place, I think I should pick out the general line of business I wanted to grow up in, and then I think I should pick out the best individual concern in that line,

and then I think I should take any job in it I could get, and let the future work itself out."

"But maybe you wouldn't hire him, Father," said Mary wickedly.

"Sh-h!" Mr. Kent smiled at Martha. "That's a compliment, but it's also knocking our competitors. Maybe Bronson thinks the Henderson outfit has better possibilities. Strictly as a matter of fact, though, I'd hire him in a minute."

"There!" Mary motioned toward Egan. "There's your chance, Bronson! Take him up! And then everything's settled."

"*I* wouldn't," said Martha quietly.

There was an odd little pause. "What's the matter, Martha?" asked Kent good-humouredly. "Do you people in Dayton think of bidding for him?"

She shook her head. "No, but of all times in the world, this is when I'd try new things — if I were a man."

"But it's so silly," protested Mary. "Like — well, like perpetual motion. Nobody'd ever want to *ride* in one of those noisy things, and do you think for a minute anybody'd *send* anything in one of 'em, if they ever wanted to see it again? Bronson, if you go into that scheme, you're just a plain nut!"

Egan flinched. "I've got one ally, anyhow — haven't I, Miss Henderson?"

"I'd do exactly what I want to," she assured him. "There mightn't ever be another chance."

As Egan smiled his gratitude at her, he intercepted a glance of appraisal from Mary. He wondered if, in

Mary's estimation, he was bestowing too much of his interest upon Martha. He deduced, after another reconnaissance, that Mary thought he was. To be sure, he had practically committed himself to look neither to the right nor to the left until Mary had put herself out of his reach by marrying some one else; but he was annoyed that she should even notice his interludes with Martha. Mentally, he begged Mary's pardon for thinking of the dog in the manger. It wasn't a nice thing to think about, but it fretted him that she should object to Martha, of all girls in the world. Then he blushed for the scarf-pin he was wearing, and he was glad that it was such a universal article. He realized now that Mary might be piqued, too, that he had sent American Beauties to both girls, instead of to Mary alone.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Kent. "Rather than have you put your neck in any noose like that, I'll find you a place in my office any time you want it."

Egan was at some pains to restrain his indignation.

"That's just the point — you'd have to find it. That's as much as to say it doesn't exist now, Colonel Kent. I didn't come back here to Plainfield to have any one find a place for me. I want to make one for myself. And I'm going to, too. And I don't want to trade on my father's reputation either. It's good of you to make me that offer, but between you and me, I expect to make more money by myself than you'd want to pay me."

"How much would he be worth to you, Father?" Mary was badgering.

"Oh, probably eighteen or twenty dollars a week to start."

"Eighteen or twenty!" Mary was overwhelmed. "Why, that would hardly pay for his laundry!"

Her father beamed at her. "I began on three dollars and a half, myself." He didn't go on, and draw the moral, but it was evident to all three of the younger people that Egan had been delicately criticized for Mary's exclamation. As a matter of fact, Egan himself was staggered by the Colonel's estimate of him. He was belittled. He had expected the Colonel to say fifty or sixty at the very lowest — and that was far too low for a man of Egan's social position.

"But if Bronson only had *that*, why, he couldn't do anything! Not a single thing. He couldn't belong to the Country Club, or the Metropolitan, or have clothes or . . . or anything. Is that the best he could get anywhere? Or do you scrimp more than other manufacturers do?"

"It's good pay for a young man with no business experience at all, Mary. And, ordinarily, I'd pay fifteen. Every year we take a few college graduates — and that's where Bronson stands now — and we've always paid 'em fifteen to start. Then they're expected to show us what they can do, and they're paid accordingly. But I know Bronson. In ten years, if he worked hard and kept his eyes in the boat, he'd be getting up towards the head office, and drawing real money."

Mary was thoughtful. "Well, then I guess you'd better take it, Bronson. It certainly isn't much, but, after all, it's a lot better being with a big company

like ours than going off on a crazy airplane scheme. And if that's where all the other young men begin, why —"

Martha was again pleasantly opposed. "Don't you let them manage you, Lieutenant Egan," she said. "You stick to your principles."

"I'm going to," he promised, conscious once more that he had awakened at least a spark of belligerence in Mary. "And I hate to say so, Colonel Kent, but I'm not awfully tempted, anyway. Why, with my allowances and all, I got over twenty-five hundred in the Army, and everybody knows the Army pays officers less than they'd earn anywhere else."

"Any time you change your mind, come and see me," said Kent heartily, and as he excused himself, he was glad that the argument hadn't become acute. He was afraid that he should have lost his temper. An Egan in full course was more of a matador than a steam-roller, and the Colonel loathed to be baited by a younger man.

For the balance of the evening, when the young people were alone, Egan took a philosophical pleasure in fanning the spark he had aroused in Mary. Not that he flirted with Martha — far from it. But he liked her, and he wasn't unwilling to have Mary perceive it. Furthermore, he was a trifle dissatisfied with Mary's attitude toward his ambitions. She seemed to him to be remarkably intolerant. And her casual assumption that he would accept her father's offer — an offer which was charitable on the face of it — irked him. Indeed, she had phrased her judgment in the words of a command. As though she owned him! And she was

piqued not only because he had rebelled, but also because he had collaborated with Martha in the rebellion. Eighteen or twenty dollars a week! There wouldn't be many American Beauties for Mary out of a salary like that! He couldn't remember when he had been so humiliated.

Martha was first to withdraw from the trio. When she had gone, Mary was punctual with upbraiding.

"Bronson Egan," she said, "I don't know what to think of you! Here I've been just as nice to you as I could be, and forgiven you for being so horrid last night, and everything, and then you go rushing Martha right in front of my eyes! . . . Oh, she's the sweetest girl in the world, and all that — but if you're in love with her already, after what you said to me —"

"Wait. . . . *Have* you forgiven me?"

She dropped her eyes.

"Well, I'll admit you don't deserve it."

"Perhaps I don't. But have you?"

"Well, I *might* have if you hadn't behaved like a regular Lothario tonight."

In spite of himself, Egan felt a joyous thrill of accomplishment.

"I'd hardly go as far as to say that."

"Well, you act like it. And the way you looked at her. . . . Of course, it's perfectly immaterial to me, but if you wanted me to believe you meant what you said. . . . The only thing is that I'd really like to know just what you're thinking, Bronson. I'm engaged; *I* haven't any right to criticize you, only after what you *said*, you know —"

He told himself raptly that at least she wasn't in-

different to him. It was something to be scolded like this.

"I'll stand by what I've said, Mary. Can't I even look at your friends without your jumping at conclusions?"

"It wasn't only that. You agreed with everything she said and you acted as though *I* didn't have any brains at all. Of course, it's none of my affair, only, if you're going to pretend you care enough for me to wait until . . . well, to wait . . . and at the same time let me see you losing your head over some other girl — why, that's different. I guess it's lucky for your peace of mind that she's going home tomorrow afternoon, isn't it?"

"Is she really going then?"

"There! Didn't I tell you!"

"But, Mary! — that was only a simple question. I —"

"It was simple enough."

"Please, dear —"

She tried to be severe, and failed.

"Well —" At his first movement, she shrank back. "Oh, I haven't *quite* forgiven you yet, but —"

"But almost?"

"Well — almost."

Egan sighed.

"Did I seem to you to lose my head, Mary?"

"You — well, no. Only you looked as though you might."

"I'll take care of that, all right," said Egan confidently.

Nevertheless there was a moment, just at that junc-

ture, when he was honestly puzzled. He certainly hadn't lost his head, but while Mary had been displeasing him, Martha had more than preserved the average of his content. It came over him, involuntarily, even while he was busy making peace, that perhaps he had been unfair to himself when he covenanted to be a second-string, or substitute, suitor to Mary Kent. Not that he had changed his mind about her — not at all — but the arrangement had proved to be, in practice, just a little bit one sided.

As he was saying good night to her, her father reappeared.

"Just a minute before you go, Bronson."

"Certainly, sir."

Accordingly, the two men were later together in the library. Kent began without preface.

"I've been running over your air proposition, Bronson. Your figures are splendid, only I don't believe you can raise capital enough, and I don't believe you're the man to run it. You're too young. Somebody'll do it, and make a big thing out of it, but you're not the man. You lack commercial training. You'd better come with us. I'd like to have you — partly for your father's sake, but mostly for your own. And I don't want you to start out in life with a failure. That's what it'll come to, if you go on with this idea — you mark my words. And I believe, with us, you'll grow up to be a valuable man. So I'm willing to stretch the point a little. You'll learn quickly — I'll give you twenty-five dollars a week to start."

"It's hard to refuse anything that comes from you, Colonel, but I'll have to."

"Why, Bronson, isn't that enough for you?"

"No, sir."

"Really think you're worth more, do you?"

"Yes, sir. I know it."

"Well — how much?"

"Two or three times, at least."

"Why, Bronson! Is that final? Is that what you really think?"

"Yes, Colonel. Frankly, I'd as soon work for you as anybody, if I intended to work for anybody. But I don't. And I need a lot more money than that. As Martha said, this may be my only chance to be independent. I want to go on with it."

Mr. Kent spread his hands. "All right. I'm sorry. How'll you raise your capital?"

"For the present, that's a secret."

"Oh! Well — that's all I wanted to say."

Egan hesitated.

"While I'm here, Colonel,— would you mind telling me what you know about my father's note transaction at your bank? And why you think our company went to pieces so fast afterward?"

The Colonel shook his head. "I haven't any idea. I've been in service, and I didn't even hear about that note until the auction was over. If I had, I could have saved you people. And Eddie did his best for the company afterwards — he let Garrity manage it. It was hard that his duty as city attorney made him lose his own money, and his clients', too, when the city had to cancel the lease. Incidentally, I didn't have anything to do personally with getting your land — that is, not until it was put on the market. My own manager wired

me — I was in Washington — that it was available, and we could have it. Some one was bound to get it, of course, and I couldn't see why I should stay out simply because of my old relationship with your father. Of course, I was a director in your company, just as your father was in mine. Each of us held one share of stock, that's all. Neither of us ever interfered with the other's business. I hadn't attended one of your meetings for a year and a half. So I don't know exactly what did happen, but I do know that Ed Macklin is a pretty good loser."

"I wondered if Henderson could have started anything. Helped along the strike, for instance. . . . I understand a lot of our workmen left to go to his plant, and he was interested in our contracts and our machinery and everything. I beg your pardon if I —"

"That's all right. He's no friend of mine, Bronson, any more than he was of your father's. Martha simply happens to be a friend of Mary's. Why — I wouldn't put it above him. That doesn't prevent Martha from being pretty nice, though, does it?"

In the hallway, at the foot of the stairs, Egan encountered Mary. She had been crying, and she looked like a lovely, heart-broken child.

"Why, Mary dear!" he said, and his arms went out to her.

She motioned him away. "I heard you. I heard you. Every word."

"You listened?" he asked, incredulous.

"Yes, I did. Why shouldn't I? I had a right to listen. I thought you were going to do what I *want*

you to — and tell Father you'd go with him. And you — you just made the horridest suspicions you could about — about Eddie, and Martha's father. I'm going to tell them. Both of them. Go away! Go away! Don't touch me! I don't want to see you again as long as I *live*."

Egan's education had failed to include the lessons of some wise woman. His arrogance failed him at the wrong time. He obeyed. He thought she really wished him to. He didn't touch her, and miserably he went away.

XI

YEARS afterward, when his closest friend asked him how he had been able to bear up so well under the double shock — the loss of his future and the loss of his fiancée, in a single day — Egan was slow about the answer. "Well," he said finally, "it was like this; I must have been too mad to have any time to be morbid."

And, indeed, he wasted few of his hours in valueless regrets. He had a remarkable vitality, which refused to let him be idle, unrebuked. His body, as well as his mind, craved action. And, in addition, he had suffered a violent concussion of his pride. Unable to endure the stigma of being without money, without prestige, he adopted, not the complaining course of a weakling, but the strenuous career of a man whose only weaknesses lay in his strength.

Notwithstanding the necessity of getting rich quick, he clung pertinaciously to his social requirements, as he saw them. In the earlier days, he had accepted his lordship as a pleasant fact, not subject to analysis; but when he perceived the value of analysis, he made it, and made it correctly.

"A man might as well look himself in the face," he said to Johnny Jones. "I've got to be doing something all the time, or I haven't got any pep."

Johnny assented. "Considering that there's hardly one of our crowd you haven't put it over on, one way or another —"

"Just so. Any time I slip, good night!"

"Like the leader of a wolf-pack," said Johnny.

"Precisely. That's why I'm so anxious to get some of these schemes moving."

"You're fixed all right for money, aren't you?"

Egan winced. He hated to be reminded of his status, which, incidentally, he had carefully concealed from the world. He wasn't soured by misfortune, but he fretted actively over it. A dozen times a day he was humiliated by the thought that it might be wise to quell his inclinations, and begin to practise economy. Three or four times out of each dozen emergencies, he revolted, and let the inclinations govern him. So had it been today, when he had paid his dues to the Metropolitan Club. The reserve fund to be applied to aëronautics was little enough, anyway.

"Oh, not so worse."

"You're an awful expense to yourself, though, honestly. Of course, I suppose you've still got considerable of a wad left, but just the same, I could live on a third of what you throw away."

"Pretty soon you won't have to, Johnny. Not when we get the insurance game running." Egan's manner implied that money was the least of his own worries, and not a subject for discussion.

Johnny looked sidelong. He was devoted to Egan, but he knew in his heart that the insurance game wouldn't run. It might stumble forward once or twice, but it would never acquire a real stride. He was afraid to betray this conviction to Egan, because Egan was so dogmatic. Johnny would rather let his friend be converted by some one else, than to quarrel with him.

"Making any progress with the express business?"

"First class. I don't see what more I could have done in a week. I've been out in a motor looking at land —"

"Hired a car, I'll bet!"

"Yes — certainly. How else could I do it?"

"Wait 'til Saturday afternoon or Sunday and let one of the gang drive you 'round for fun."

"Had too many dates for the week-end. . . . Well, I've looked at land, and got some idea of costs, and doped out a prospectus."

"To be printed?"

"Oh, no. Just so as to have it all down in black-and-white."

"Who's going to be your salesman?"

"Why, I am myself."

Johnny wasn't over-enthusiastic. "Think that's a good idea? Personally, I never could see where there was much percentage in a promoter's going out and selling his own proposition. It's so much better to hire a crackajack solicitor, somebody who talks the language, and pay him enough commission to make it worth his while to hustle. When you go out with it yourself, you lay yourself wide open."

Egan gave him a hoot of scorn. "D'you think I'd pay anybody a commission for anything as easy as selling stock in a concern like this? When it'll practically sell itself? Well, hardly. I can use that commission just as well as a solicitor can."

Again, Johnny avoided the issue. "Got any bites yet?"

"I haven't put on any bait yet. But when I spoke

of it at dinner the other night, both Wilson and Pennypacker got interested right away, and Pennypacker came up here afterwards to ask a lot more questions. . . ." Egan chuckled. "I made him help me move trunks."

"Well, has he got any money?"

"I shouldn't wonder. He said something about liquidating some securities he owns. And strictly between you and me, he's just the kind of man we want as stockholders. He doesn't know the first blamed thing about aviation. He'd have to let us alone."

"Don't fool yourself about that! He wouldn't, whether he had to or not. Any idea what he'd put up, if he put up anything?"

"Oh, when you come right down to it," said Egan, superciliously, "I don't suppose he has much. Five or ten thousand'd be his limit. Still, that's a start."

"I hate to hear you talk so careless about money. Five or ten thousand's a *lot*."

Egan only laughed. "To change the subject, how do you like the room, now I've got it fixed up?"

"Pretty good."

"I think it's a corker." Egan inspected it with much pleasure.

"Too much junk to take care of, isn't it?"

"I don't have to do it."

It was perhaps a blessing that he didn't, for the room would have given a conscientious housekeeper the blind staggers. It was a kaleidoscopic review of the past, dating from 1907, when Egan had sat in his first group photograph of a high-school football team, to the week before last. The wall-paper was visible only

in an occasional narrow streak between two pictures. Trophies from college and from France disputed for shelf-room. All Egan's prize cups were in evidence; a winning oar was there, too; and at least a hundred pounds of correspondence, in cardboard transfer-cases already bursting with boredom.

"You've certainly made it easy for your biographer," said Johnny, thoughtfully. "But I notice you haven't brought it up to date yet."

"How's that?"

"I'm looking for a model airplane, or something. Something that might remind you of next year instead of last year when you get up and walk —"

"Oh, you go to thunder!" said Egan, scaling a pillow at him. "What have *you* been doing — reading the *American Magazine?* Or studying Professor Turgid Bean's book on how to judge somebody's character by the way he eats soup?"

"Go on and laugh. . . . Only I knows what I knows."

"Go ahead and tell it. It ought not to take long."

"All right, I'll tell what we both know. It won't take any longer. . . . Haven't you got any further than Lesson Two?"

"What?" Egan began to flush. "What's that you're talking about?"

"Lesson Two. 'Learn to be a Business Executive. In your own home. Half an hour a day, unless addled sooner.' Over there on your desk."

Egan made as though to rise, and sank back again, laughing.

"Oh, that. Business Management. Oh, of course

it's all bunk. I'm only reading it for amusement. I thought I'd put those books out of sight."

"I know you did," said Johnny gravely. "I always keep mine on the table . . ."

During the week, Egan had called twice on the Kents, but on both occasions Mary had been out. He was distressed by the new strain in their relationship, but he had too much faith in the power of the calendar to consider the present impasse as permanent. Besides, his daily association with Judge Perkins was calming to his nerves.

He also took much pleasure from the company of Adams. Adams, sitting shoeless in his room at twilight, was capable of almost as many visions as Egan. With his feet resting on the window-sill, and a good cigar giving off its aroma to his nostrils, Adams occupied himself, as long as Egan would listen to him, with disconnected accounts of the vast fortunes made in New York by men no older than Egan.

"Yes," said Adams. "About all you need is foresight and capital. There was a chap just about your age. There was an old hulk down on the Jersey shore. Wrecked. The owners had taken her machinery out of her and left her there. This chap figured she could be salvaged, and have sails bent on her, and do for a freighter. This was in 1914. So he borrowed $60,000, and got her off the sand, and fitted her up, and sold her — the war had started then — for $175,000 cash. Now he's in the shipping business, making a million a year."

"And all he had was foresight!"

Adams gently brushed the ash from his cigar. "Yes,

and capital — or rather credit, but it amounts to the same thing . . . and I suppose he knew something about ships, too."

"Oh, yes — of course."

"Then there was a nice young fellow who was in England just after the war started. Out of a job, too, I guess. And as soon as they began to talk about a long war, he saw an opening, and dashed for it. He got turned down in England, and then he dashed over to France. And the result of it was that he got a commission of about two cents a gallon on at least half the gasolene that went over there. I don't dare to guess how much he made. And that's the same story over again."

"Foresight! Just where *we*'ve got 'em! And I've got a little capital."

"To be sure; to be sure. He saw the big chance, and took it. Didn't even have any capital. But he'd worked ten years for the Standard Oil Company, and he knew the business."

"I've always felt that I could make money if I had to," said Egan, hushed. "It's nothing but a question of the right idea —"

"And the right people to run it," said Adams, unobtrusively.

"And a little money in the bank." He breathed regularly. "We'll all be rich some day, Uncle Stanley."

"Ever decide for yourself just what that means?"

"Y-e-e-s, in a way . . . I don't think I'd ever want any more than my father had. Enough to be comfortable on."

"You would be, Bronson."

Egan looked at him suspiciously. "You're still sure of the Transport Company, aren't you? You haven't got cold feet, have you? Don't you think we three — or four, counting in Johnny — don't you still think we're going to make a lot out of it, Uncle Stanley?"

Adams put down his feet, and gazed at the ash of his cigar. "Yes, Bronson. If I didn't, I wouldn't be so willing to quit my job on the *Times* and come with you, would I? I think we're going to get a lot out of it, Bronson — a lot."

XII

MR. EDWARD MACKLIN was no cloying sentimentalist with cereal for brains and a smirk for every pretty passer-by; on the contrary, he was a cool, alert, well-poised young attorney who in his time had been a rattling good plunging halfback, and still looked it. He could ride and shoot and sail and swim with the best of his sex, and sometimes did, but at other moments, he was extremely fond of the society of girls, and not ashamed of it. It was his boast, however, that in politics of all kinds, he knew what he was doing, every minute. And he knew, a minute beforehand, what he was going to do next.

Among men, he had rather a reputation as a cryptic (as far as any politician could afford to be) but it would have been a very difficult matter for any girl of social experience — a girl like Martha Henderson, for example — to misunderstand him. Heredity and environment, delicately balanced, had given him a distinctive set of traits, and a distinctive method of exercising them; men were baffled by them, women were flattered. A most accomplished squire of dames, he had never permitted any girl to imagine, even remotely, that her future depended on him, until, after a long campaign of research, he had carefully and logically selected the one who best would complement his career.

Miss Millicent McCain, however, was lacking in experience. To be sure, her striking ash-blondness and her big, expressive eyes had already got her several

desperate proposals from impecunious young gentlemen hardly within the draft age, but she wasn't plastic enough to have acquired maturity out of these incidents. She was the sort of girl who could live indefinitely without absorbing sufficient joy, or sufficient sorrow, to be mature; the sort of girl whose children, if she ever had any, were predestined to become her guardians before they were out of their teens.

She was just now approaching the age at which every girl, no matter how innocent, no matter how womanly, regards every detached young man, perhaps without crystallizing the idea into conscious thought, as a more or less eligible candidate for the serious partnership of life. But Millicent, on the threshold of that age, was also on the point of crystallizing that thought.

Naturally, then, she had misjudged Bronson Egan, and put him down in the list of cold-blooded aristocrats. Her first interview with him had excited her acutely, and after it she had thought that he was almost grand enough to be the hero of a novel; but subsequently, as she slowly gathered that he had no more sentimental interest in her than in a newel-post, she was both shocked and insulted. The armour of the hero had misled her into thinking a hero inside. She had fancied that he would straightway buy back from her mother that worthless Egan stock — not as an act of impulsive, short-sighted altruism, but in swift reaction to the charms of Millicent. She had so dreamed, and so built. Then, when she learned that he had no intention of reviving the dramatic part of King Cophetua, she lost a large fraction of her admiration for him; and she lost most of the rest of it when it appeared

that he was poor in pocket, and critical of his breakfast. It was enough to irritate the best of daughters! Thereafter, she followed the normal procedure — normal for a girl of her tendencies — of arguing that all his outward qualities were as deceiving as his sentiments. He ceased to be a courtier in her eyes. He ceased almost to be a gentleman. He was a polished villain; and as she devoured apples and Robert W. Chambers in the solitude of her own room, she could almost see him stalking cold-bloodedly through the pages of her book until he died, in the ante-penultimate chapter, a conscience-tortured suicide. By that time, Millicent herself would presumably have married the Christy illustration in the frontispiece, and lived happily ever after.

Nothing galled her so much, now that her antagonism towards him was feeding fat, as the necessity of caring for his room. She was still outraged by the necessity of helping out Georgina, and caring for any man's room at all, but some of the other quarters were moderately endurable, and some of them even had their points of attraction. Stanley Adams' apartment, for example, was beautifully ascetic; she felt no more personality in it than in a hospital cell. Judge Perkins' room was soothingly dry with law and tobacco smoke. Johnny Jones' room was as laughable as a vaudeville performance, except when he had put cigarette ashes in the washbowl. Mr. Ganzenberry's had lovely pictures in it.

But Egan's room had the power of affecting her with mysterious qualms. She hated to enter the door; but once inside she hated to go out again. It was a semi-morbid hypnosis beyond her comprehension. She knew

only that to touch the pillow his head had rested upon filled her with abhorrence; and yet with a certain fugitive pleasure in the abhorrence itself. His personal belongings were as mesmeric as snakes; potent to arouse curiosity; potent to arouse the wish to destroy, as though the destruction of them meant personal injury to himself. His clothing made her turn pale with indetermination; she used to stand sometimes, wondering vaguely and half-hysterically what she could do to vent her fury upon these immaculate garments of his, which seemed to be alive with his own person. Alive, but without emotion. So diabolically characteristic of the man himself. Especially his uniform, now hanging neatly in the closet, aroused her passion. He had looked so brave, so soldierly in it when she had come upon him that first morning. If she had dared, she would have carried that treacherous uniform out by the tips of her fingers and burned it. She prayed — without a spark of humour — for moths to ruin it. Once she kissed it, over the heart; and that was the day she wondered if it would pay to run away and be an actress.

And as Egan gradually took upon himself, more and more distinctly, the rôle of villain in the novel she was mentally constructing out of her own life, the obvious mechanics of the situation compelled her, since there was no Christy illustration among her lesser acquaintances, to cast Macklin for the hero.

Macklin was good-looking. He was prominent in politics, and aiming higher, and he was said to have good aim. As her mother's lawyer, he had been always kind and casually attentive to Millicent. He had almost wept when the Egan disaster ruined the McCain

fortunes, and he had told Mrs. McCain that they were fellow-sufferers. He had made a community of feeling out of it. He had sympathized with them to the extent of offering Millicent a clerkship in his office; but Mrs. McCain couldn't spare her. He had persuaded the City Hospital to rent them the Egan house at a remarkably low figure, and he had sent them three boarders. It was degrading to take boarders, and the three he had sent were all rather eccentric, but if one had to take them, it was well to have a friend to serve as reference, and provider. If Macklin had got control of the Egan Company sooner, its downfall might actually have been averted by his efforts. Like son, like father. Perhaps Old Man Egan had been a villain, too.

And Macklin wasn't nearly so recessive, so formal, as Egan. He shook hands differently, lingering over the courtesy as did the patrician suitor on page 124. He had twice patted her shoulder at farewell. How could she know that this was merely a reaction from the chronic aloofness of his evangelistic mother, and the touch-me-not acidity of his sister? He was no sentimentalist, but he had never known affection in his own refrigerated home; so that he bestowed it charitably upon horses and dogs — and girls like Millicent.

She didn't know of his predilection for Mary Kent. That engagement had never been announced, and gossip rarely drifted from the upper levels of Plainfield society down to Millicent. She never dreamed how Macklin still sensed that the quickening of the pulses under the influence of a pretty face doesn't by any means guarantee a cheerful companionship for ever, or any tangible

assistance to a sprouting career. She didn't suspect that Macklin, calculating even in his loneliness, refused to fall or stumble into love, because he felt that it would be just as easy to fall or stumble out of. She took it for granted that he would marry from instinct, which isn't at all the same as marrying from choice. And on this assumption, why shouldn't he marry Millicent? It would be such a stunning blow to Egan.

Yes, Macklin was a success. In popular estimation, he was going up, while Egan was going down.

She was reading a comic paper one day, and ran across a superannuated story which was new to her. A gentleman in a restaurant had ordered soft-shelled crabs; when they were brought to him, they were minus the claws. The waiter, replying to a vigorous protest, explained that a score of live crabs, left unguarded, had engaged in a battle royal, and that some of them had consequently been disarmed.

"Then take them back," said the guest promptly, "and bring me a couple of the winners."

Long after she had forgotten the style of the story, she was influenced by its lesson. A moral is a moral, whether contained in a farce comedy or not. Only the future ages can decide whether Billy Sunday's humour has been more effective than the gravity of Dr. Talmage.

Eddie Macklin, striding buoyantly into the gilt and fragile drawing-room of the old Egan mansion, found it tenanted only by Miss McCain, who had dropped on her lap a volume by her third favourite author, and was wondering blissfully how it would seem to have

Maurice Hewlett write about her. Macklin smiled, and coughed lightly, and Millicent started.

"Oh!" she said. "I — I — I didn't know you were there!"

"Well, I am," said Macklin.

She gave him her hand as aristocratically as she could manage, and surveyed him from under her telling lashes. Macklin had a thrill; not the kind of thrill which threatens employment to the caterer and engraver — indeed, Mary Kent herself had never given him that; it was solely in recognition of the facts. She was as fascinating as a young kitten, with equal grace and superior deportment, just as warmly alive and no more dangerous.

"Won't you sit down?"

"In a minute." He was still smiling down at her.

Millicent caught her breath. She misunderstood the light in his eyes. The book sprawled to the floor as Millicent stood tremulously upright, almost defensive.

"What's the excitement about?" asked Macklin, and because she was very near to him, and — to his way of thinking — as safe as his angular sister and vastly more appealing, he slipped his arm around her, in strict neutrality of emotion. Instantaneously, Millicent went stone-rigid; and instantaneously, he was aware of his egregious error. Some one had taken him seriously, and when he least expected it. Before he knew what was happening, she had crumpled against him, and buried her face against his coat.

Macklin was paralysed. No one, not even Mary Kent, had ever before cried on his shoulder, as Millicent was doing now. Intuitively, although without guilt, he

knew what it meant; just as he had known intuitively, years ago, when he had had his ears boxed for the first time by a girl, that the tingle carried full forgiveness with it. Those are the only two known instances in which a woman isn't subtle.

"Oh, Eddie!" she said, in a funny, muffled, broken little voice. "Oh — Eddie!"

He continued to hold her, because he didn't know what else to do. His numbed faculties took the form of a reflective narration to himself in the present tense, as though he were describing to himself what a predicament he was in, what a compromise. She clung to him more tightly, and his throat was dusty and his eyes were hot and strained. If any one should come in! The existing moment, even while he was so exquisitely conscious of its peril, seemed not to exist, but to be a recollection of some distant horror, long since in the past.

"I really don't see what I can do about changing your room, Mr. Ganzenberry. I —" Mrs. McMCain pushed open the portières, and Mrs. McCain, not being as careful of her utterances as people surprised are often supposed to be, cried out sharply and frenziedly: "*Millicent!*"

In the doorway, the little artist was standing with hands upraised, in ministerial amazement. Mrs. McCain motioned furiously to him. "Go back!" she said. "Go *back*. Out of the house. Anywhere . . ." Very, very reluctantly, Mr. Ganzenberry went back. He had seen a picture that he wouldn't forget. It gave him a beautiful idea for a cover-design that he might conceivably sell to a magazine. Startled lovers, with Mother at the door.

Millicent, forest-wild, had fled headlong. Macklin, nervous to his finger tips, was standing by the window, in a very black and chilly mood. Mrs. McCain, thoroughly aroused for once in her pale blue life, faced him. Her chin was very mobile, and she was breathing unpleasantly through her nose. Her whole body vibrated with wrath. Her white collar, ordinarily impeccable, was all awry, and Macklin couldn't keep his eyes from it, couldn't keep it from coming irrelevantly into his thoughts. He wished it could somehow get straightened.

"And you have the gall — the unmitigated gall," she said, in a penetratingly low voice, "to stand there and tell me — *me* — it was just in fun! Fun!" She was moving towards him, and Macklin was steadily, unwillingly, backing away. "What do you mean by it? How can you dare to stand there and tell me — *me* — a thing like that! Lay your hands on my daughter, and say it's nothing! In my own house! In a public room! Do you think for one minute I'm fool enough to believe my daughter lets every Tom, Dick and Harry that comes along make love to her in her own house? I want you to *answer* me —"

"I'm trying to," said Macklin, sullenly. He had attempted honey, and injured innocence, without result. "If you'd be calm and —"

"Yes — 'be calm!' You'd be calm yourself, wouldn't you? That's a *man* for you! Be calm! Answer me!" She stamped her foot heavily. "*Answer* me!"

Macklin put out his hand.

"Well, if you don't believe what I tell you —"

"Believe what you tell me when I saw you with my own eyes? I know better. What's fun for you may not be quite so funny for *me*, young man."

Macklin found himself cornered. "I've told you over and over again. I'm sorry. I'll apologize until I'm black in the face, but that won't change the facts. She took it the wrong way. So do you. There wasn't any harm in it —"

"Oh! *Wasn't* there? How do *you* know? *I*'m the one to decide that, young man. So it's just that! 'No harm in it!' 'You didn't mean anything at all!'" Her breathing became more pronounced. "Well, just you wait while I bring Millicent down here and let's have you tell *her* that. Let's find out what *she* thinks you meant. Let's see how funny it is to *her*. You wait!"

"No. Don't do that." Macklin had sidled out of his corner, and arrested her just in time. "I tell you that's all there is *to* it. Damn it —"

"Don't you *dare* to swear in my house! I won't *stand* it! As though it isn't enough —"

"I tell you, it's ridiculous. It's impossible. You don't understand. You —"

"Oh — ridiculous, is it?" She shuddered, and Macklin drew back.

"Yes," he said stoutly, "ridiculous. For one thing, because it was all in fun, as I've said over and over again; and for another —" He determined, hurriedly, upon the only alibi that would probably end any of her ideas that she could coerce him into a declaration. "— because I'm engaged. You'll simply have to believe me, Mrs. McCain. I'm not as bad as you'd make

me out to be. It was — just a moment. I'm sorry. If I'd the faintest idea in the world she'd take it —"

"So you're engaged?" she asked, her voice suddenly falling. "Engaged! Engaged to be married to — some other girl. And then you come —" She laughed scornfully in his face. "Did you think I owe you so much you could do as you like around here? With *Milly?*"

"You owe me a good deal," said Macklin. "I shouldn't have mentioned it if you hadn't."

She was silent for a moment, her mouth working. Then she flung out her hand towards the door.

"You leave the house," she said. "I'll tell Milly myself. You're not fit to. If you ever dare speak to her again I . . . I'll . . . Get out of here, you . . . you swindler! Yes, that's what I said! You've swindled Milly out of . . . I can't bear the *sight* of you. I can't bear to *look* at you. Get out! And don't you ever show your nose around here again."

Macklin, white and apprehensive, went a step or two.

"What I came up for," he said, coldly, "as I've told you over and over again, was to show you a way to get back the money you lost in Egan stock. And if this is the way you take it —"

Against her will, she heard; and hearing, she lost what mental balance she had retained.

"You know my — you know my own money — every penny I had — you know —" She was shaking with rage. "What are you trying to do — *you!* Trying to buy — trying to *buy* my daughter with your dirty fifty thousand dollars?"

Privately, Macklin said to himself that she wasn't

worth it. "No, Mrs. McCain. I'm trying to show you how you're misjudging me. I came to do you a tremendous piece of good. I —"

"You've done enough. I won't *hear* you! Will you *go*, or shall I —"

He realized that he should have to go, and return when she was more tractable. He made a final effort to be nonchalant.

"Well — what? Call the police?"

"No," she said. "Just Milly."

Her eyes were like gimlets through his mind as he went out.

Mr. Ganzenberry was complacently sitting on the front steps and sketching on the back of an old envelope as Macklin slammed his way out of the house.

XIII

GRADUALLY, at the end of his third week in Plainfield, there stole over Egan the consciousness that his money was melting away far too rapidly. He had never squandered energy on an expense account, and he had never bothered to live on a budget system. He wished, whimsically, that somebody could treat him with chemical which would have the same effect on him as creosote has on a roof. He wanted to be expenditure-proofed.

If he had intended to go to work in one of Plainfield's old and settled concerns, his present bank balance, of course, would remain as a decent nest-egg. But the greater part of that balance was consecrated to investment in his own company. There were only three avenues of refuge open to him, and two of these were dangerous. One was to draw upon the reserve fund, and trust to luck; one was to borrow shamelessly from the Honourable George; one was to persuade some open-minded friend to subscribe, even before incorporation, for a block of Transport stock. Then Egan could legitimately pay himself a commission out of it, or even a salary.

The last of the three possibilities appealed to him. It would test out his ability as a salesman, and it would provide him with funds without disclosing his need of them. And Egan shrank with horror from any deed, or word, which would suggest even to his closest friends

that he hadn't still some pretty considerable resources of his own. He went so far as to regret his confession to Judge Perkins.

The choice of his first subscriber was a matter of nice discrimination. Egan began to consider it on Saturday afternoon, while he was practically unrecognizable in a sea of lather at the barber's, and he continued to reflect upon it during his manicure, later. He was loath to make overtures to any of his younger Vine Street friends, and he was particularly averse to sounding Adams, or Jones, or Kent. Whatever he did, he must do circumspectly, almost indifferently; and his appeal must be made to some one who wouldn't interpret its truth.

Pennypacker! Egan's start of triumph made the manicure come within an ace of committing mayhem with the cuticle-scissors.

Mr. Pennypacker had shown great interest in the venture, and he had spoken vaguely of selling other securities in order to participate in Transport profits. Pennypacker evidently held one end of the line of least resistance, and Egan decided to follow it forthwith. But Mr. Pennypacker, beginning at the other end, followed it first.

It was at a particularly inauspicious hour that Mr. Pennypacker knocked on the door of Egan's room. Egan had just finished arraying himself in the newest of evening raiment, the most exclusive of shirtings, the most silken of three-dollar hose. He had tied four ties once apiece, and one tie four times, and he wasn't yet satisfied with the result. Nor was he reconciled to the bills which would presently flutter upon him for all this

glory. "Still," he said to himself. "A man with my social position to keep up —"

At this juncture, Mr. Pennypacker had knocked daintily.

"Come!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Pennypacker. "An orgy of self-beautification." And given his loud, unemphasized laugh.

Egan was in too much of a hurry to set the trap.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Why, I don't know. Don't mind me; go on with your dressing. Gone any further with your development?"

"Yes."

Mr. Pennypacker settled himself comfortably. "I've been thinking it over, Mr. Egan, and I've pretty nearly made up my mind to make you a proposition. Of course, statistics show that in this state alone, the new incorporations per day are only two and a third times the bankrupticies and dissolutions. But I'm almost settled on going behind of the statistics for once. In other words, I'd like to have a chance to be in with you, in a small way, on your company. I've read all the last issues of *Aerial Age*, *Air Power*, *Aircraft Journal*, and *Flying*, and I'm willing to take a small gamble, if you want me. If you can see your way clear to meet me half way."

Egan wheeled from the mirror, a fresh tie in his hand. He was profoundly impressed, and delighted, but he had an appointment which was sacred. "That sounds good to me. But couldn't you wait 'til tomorrow? I've got to go out as soon as I —"

"Oh, no hurry, no hurry. I just thought . . . If you get in before midnight, you might drop in to see me. I'm a night-owl."

"I will." He managed to get the exact twist he desired. "Any idea how much you'd like to come in for?" His voice was ever so little unsteady.

"Well, I've got some securities. I'd like to have you take some of 'em off my hands. And some cash, too, of course."

"Any idea what the securities are worth?"

Mr. Pennypacker nodded. "The par value is sixteen thousand dollars."

Egan rigorously restrained himself. "Bonds?"

"No; industrials. Common stock."

"Easily marketable?"

"Well, they're not quoted on any Exchange, but I guess they'll be worth par to you. I'm sure they will."

Egan glanced at his watch. He should have dearly loved to hear this story out, but the story could wait, and his appointment couldn't.

"What did you want to do, Mr. Pennypacker — trade even?"

"That's what I'd thought."

Egan was uplifted, and almost immediately let down again. Just as he had told Johnny Jones, no solicitor was necessary. Here was a statistician, a man of snail-like slowness and accuracy, coming of his own accord to bid for stock, after hearing merely an outline of the Transport Company. The idea had sold itself.

"That sounds reasonable. . . . You'll excuse me for running, won't you? But I like your suggestion, and I'll certainly be glad to talk it over with you."

"Oh, no hurry, no hurry." He laughed stridently.

Egan was visited by a timely inspiration. "Entirely separate from any trade deal, Mr. Pennypacker — if you'd care to make any subscription in cash, there'd be a stock bonus of, say, twenty-five per cent. Just think that over, too, while you're about it, and —"

Mr. Pennypacker looked up ingenuously.

"Well, I could make you some sort of offer there, too, I guess. Not any big amount. But the average income in this state, according to the last tax census, was about thirteen hundred dollars —" He laughed shyly. "I'm making considerable above the average, anyway. And I've saved some. You drop in and see me, and we'll talk it over. . . . Going to dance?"

"Yes." Egan found his stick and gloves.

"Nice, cool night for it. Coolest for this date in nineteen years. Well, be sure and look in on me. I'd kind of like to get it settled."

"Yes, so would I," responded Egan cordially.

Within the hour, Egan had committed the next of his greatest indiscretions and, to put the matter plainly, it was due to wrath and geography combined. It wasn't a question of the proverbial inch, nor yet of the proverbial mile, but if Mary Kent had lived, say, half a dozen blocks further distant from the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue, or if Egan's resentment hadn't carried him downtown from Mary's house with the speed of a motion-picture pedestrian, this particular indiscretion might have been averted. But the lay of the land was permanent, and Egan hadn't even begun to slow down when he reached the corner.

He had been on the Kent lawn not more than ten minutes when wrath was engendered in him, and not more than fifteen minutes before he surreptitiously departed; and inasmuch as the lawn under the trees provided a low visibility, his preparations of the afternoon and evening proved to be quite as futile as the efforts of the darkey who ran a furlong in order to acquire impetus enough to jump a two-foot fence. No one, not even Mary, had appreciated his expensive grandeur, or comprehended it.

The arrangement had been for nine young people to meet at the Kents', and to go out to the Country Club by motor. Egan, pardoned by telephone, was the odd man; but at the time of his arrival, he found himself, pending the appearance of the last girl, one of two odd men, and the other one was Henry Luke.

Henry's father was president of the Citizens Trust Company, and Henry, who was no older than Egan, had done what everybody reads about, and few accomplish; he had gambled in Wall Street in 1916 and 1917 and made money; and stayed out of it in 1918 and saved all he had made.

He had always been a good and pompous friend to Egan; and except for his habit of extremely plain speech, Egan liked him well enough to endure him for a quarter of an hour.

"Did you walk over, Bronson? Pretty hot, wasn't it? I'd have picked you up on the way if you'd telephoned me."

Egan's supersensitive ear caught a patronizing note which wasn't there.

"Oh, only four blocks, Henry."

"I know, but uphill, on a night like this —"

"I hardly think I'll walk up it many more times." Egan here made one of those rash declarations which every one alive has sometimes made, and seldom, had such reason to regret afterwards. It was purely spontaneous, perfectly harmless, and a man less literal than Henry Luke, who wore tortoise-rimmed spectacles and had no sense of humour, would have taken it at the proper discount. "I'm sort of thinking of getting a car myself."

Henry peered at him through the dusk. "What kind? A flivver?"

Egan snorted. The idea of being patronized was sufficiently repulsive in itself, but it was doubly accentuated in the current instance. Partly because Henry was Henry, and partly because Henry had been lucky in Wall Street. Besides, Egan was counting his chickens before he had cornered the hen. He was banking solidly on Mr. Pennypacker to come through. More than that, he had really told himself, a day or two ago, that he wished he had his old red roadster back. Socially, and in the solicitation of business, it would have been a decided asset. And he had really wondered how soon he could have a car. A flivver.

But after Henry's innocent question —

"Hardly!" said Egan. "I've got my eye on a sportster now."

Henry looked at him queerly. He knew from old experience that Egan would defend his wildest statement to the last ditch. Henry laughed. It wasn't a cruel laugh, or even a cynical laugh, but one of pure amusement.

"Don't you be an ass, Bronson."

"What?" said Egan.

Henry glanced behind him to make sure that they were out of earshot from the girls. He was a trifle startled by the response to his opening gun, but when Henry fired, he generally fired for effect.

"Ayop," said Henry, as an affirmative. "That's what I said. Don't be a silly ass."

Egan had no vocabulary to spare at that moment. He could only yammer.

"That's what they're all saying," said Henry, with the air of a conscientious reporter. "Everybody's saying you're talking a lot about what you're going to do, and then not doing it. I thought I owed it to you to tell you, Bronson. If I didn't, somebody else might tell you sometime not in the friendly spirit *I* tell you. I've known you a long time, and I know you're a darn' fine fellow, and all that, but I don't believe you want the whole town to go around saying you're bluffing all the time, and yet that's exactly what they're doing, Bronson. And about this car thing, there doesn't need to be any bluffing between you and me. You can try bluffing somebody else if you think you want to, but you and I know each other too well for you ever to think of putting anything like that over on *me*." He put out a hand which he meant to be fatherly. "It's for your own good, Bronson," he said. "You just gotta stop this bluffing. Don't forget I'm a director of the Citizens Trust Company — *and I know you can't afford it.* The first thing you know, everybody in this town will be saying you're nothing but an old blowhard."

"Blowhard!" said Egan, under his breath. He was still knocked endwise by the unexpected assault.

"Yes," said Henry, peering down at Egan from the height of six feet five. "An old blowhard. That's what they're just getting ready to say about you. This airplane scheme of yours is so darn' big, it's only funny to hear you talk about it. But when it's only a *car* —"

A wave of superheated indignation passed over Egan, and set his brain afire. His throat was arid. The worst of it, the sickening part of it, was that Henry Luke had no imagination. When he quoted, he quoted verbatim. When he merely reported, he reported faithfully.

"Blowhard!" said Egan, with almost an interrogation in it.

"I'll tell you who's as much as said so. First, there was —"

"Don't!"

"Well," said Henry, "you see what I mean, don't you? So when you talk about getting a car —"

Egan was caught in a flood of furious shame which he couldn't resist, and it was multiplied a thousandfold by the gruesome contrast between the effect he had intended to produce on Henry, and the effect that Henry had succeeded in producing on him. He turned aside from Henry, and found himself facing, at an interval of only a few yards, that group of half a dozen of his old friends. He dared not attempt to guess how many of them shared in this awful characterization of himself. But he knew that he couldn't go through this

evening as he had planned. Nor any other evening, until he had erased the characterization. He also knew that above all things, he mustn't obey the driving impulse to fall upon Henry tooth and nail, and wipe out the base insinuation. A weaker man might have laughed it off; but Egan had been hurt to the last, infinitely tender tissue of his pride. He had never been so hurt in all his life. His brain almost ceased functioning. He saw blood-red. Blowhard!

His Irish wrath, whipped up in an instant, assumed the absolute command over him.

"Here! Bronson! Come back here! Hey! Listen a minute!"

Egan had disappeared into the dusk. A few minutes later, when the last girl arrived, no one could locate him. Presently, after allowing him a reasonable law, the double quartet got itself in motion. The mystery of his disappearance remained, however, a topic of discussion for the next hour. Henry Luke, truthful to the bitter end, said he guessed that Bronson had suddenly been taken sick or something. They telephoned from the Country Club, but Miss McCain, irked by the knowledge that it was from the Country Club that they telephoned, answered coldly that he hadn't come in.

Then all the others were uncomfortable, and Henry Luke felt very sheepish.

In the meantime, billow after billow of degradation had rocked over Egan's head. He had no sequence of thought; his brain was merely a receptacle for a vast mass of hot and quivering anger. Blowhard! And for this he had purposed to give to the town of his na-

tivity the glory of his initiative, and genius! So it was common gossip, then. People talked about it. *What* people? What right had Henry Luke or any one else in the whole wide world to gossip about him, and what he would do or wouldn't do, and what he could afford?

He was hardly aware that his wrath had carried him to the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue; he hadn't gone there of his own accord, but unwittingly, instinctively. He had followed the trail of memory which led him to a huge show window, wherein stood a low, shining, battleship-grey roadster, magnificent with upholstery and instruments. It wasn't worth a third of what his old red runabout had cost, but it was a car, and not a flivver. He was swept inward.

"How much *that?*" he demanded.

The proprietor stared at Egan, stared at the car, and stared at Egan again. Egan was distinctly not in the spirit of a purchaser. His aspect indicated that he needed a sedative more than an automobile; but his voice was peremptory enough to bring a respectful answer.

"That? Why, that's been used for a demonstrator. It's gone about eleven hundred miles. The price of a new one, f.o.b. Detroit, is fourteen sixty, and I —"

"How much *that?*" Egan had gestured so vehemently that the agent side-stepped.

"Why, I guess we could let you have that, if you want it, for eleven hundred flat. I —"

"*When?*" Even in his headlong momentum, Egan had time to remember the support that was to come from Mr. Pennypacker.

"Why — why, when did you want it, sir?"

"When can I *have* it?"

The agent blinked, and laughed a little. "Why, if you can pay for it, you can have it as soon as you can take it out of the window. I —"

"Take a check? . . . My name's Bronson Egan. Father's James Egan, of . . ."

The agent reacted favourably.

"Oh, certainly. . . . Your check's good here. Now —"

Egan was already flinging riotous blobs of ink from his fountain pen.

"I'll drive it out."

The agent gulped, but the check looked good. The name of Egan was better yet. He turned, and bellowed to the supply department in the rear.

"Hi, Jake! Come help roll out this Model G. Guy's in a big hurry!" He turned back. "Understand how she drives, do you? She's got plenty of oil in her, and ten gallons of gas —"

Egan, on the sidewalk, had already begun to cool, while the engine was warming up. Wrath had guided him to a great folly, and geography was too late to help. He climbed into the little roadster, and gingerly tested the gears.

"I guess you can manage her all right, Mr. Egan. Thank you very, very much. Any time we can do anything for you —"

"All right." Egan let in the clutch. At the next corner, he drew a long and tremulous breath; slackened speed; almost stopped. A brief spasm of reason shook him. He could still return, and probably get his check back. It would be embarrassing; but —

"Blowhard!" he said unexpectedly, aloud.

The epithet brought colourful recollection to him. Egan swallowed hard. His eyes felt strained and hot. Determinedly, he stepped on the accelerator. Out Central Avenue towards the Country Club — and Henry Luke — and all the others.

"To hell with 'em!" said Egan passionately. "To hell with 'em!"

Out of deference to tomorrow's pulpits, the dance had ended at five minutes of twelve. Henry Luke, after the others had finished their superficial examination and equally superficial compliments, had drawn Egan aside.

"Bronson," he said gravely, "I'm sorry if I made you put your foot in the bucket. I'm afraid you're in wrong. But I want to assure you right here and right now I disclaim all responsibility. All I told you was —"

"The only trouble with you — Hank," said Egan, using the nickname which Henry loathed beyond description. "The only trouble with you, Hank — you talk too much."

He drove home the prettiest girl he could find, and detach. And he flirted with her outrageously. He took the little car up Vine Street, and ran it into the old barn. He went upstairs, and knocked softly at the door of Mr. Pennypacker's room. Mr. Pennypacker was sitting up for him. Mr. Pennypacker had got out his securities, and had them on his table.

"Whose car was that I heard come in here?"

Egan gulped. "Mine."

"Oh! . . . Something new? Oh! . . . indeed.

Well, there's one to every seven and a half people in this state alone. . . . So you bought yourself a car, eh?" Mr. Pennypacker smiled lugubriously. "Well, that's fine, that's fine. Enjoy your dance? Good. I'm glad to hear it. . . . Now about this trade of ours. If you bought yourself a new car, I guess you're in a position to trade, all right."

"Any water in here?"

"Over in the corner. Go right ahead; help yourself." Mr. Pennypacker sat back and watched him. "Now if you're ready to talk —"

Egan's eyes were caught by something on the table. He came over swiftly.

"What's this?"

"That's what I want to trade with. Every nickel I had went into it. So with you buying cars and everything, I thought the least you could do would be to trade even, and give me a chance on your next scheme — isn't it? Sixteen thousand in your airplane scheme against sixteen thousand Egan common?" Mr. Pennypacker's gaze was devastating. "I thought that's only fair, sort of. Seeing it's all in your family. You don't need to look so sick about it. . . . I lost my pile in your father's outfit, didn't I? I *said* it was an industrial stock. I said I guess they'd be worth par to you. Ain't your reputation worth an even trade? All I ask is a trade — share for share. Just so I have a chance on your new scheme — to make up for going broke on the old one. Since it's all in the family. And — and just to show I'm not a hog, I'll give you, in cash, to boot — I'll give you one-third of all I've got in the

bank. Then I'll have some sort of run for my money. You're bright; I might make —"

Egan was breathing to the bottom of his lungs.

"How much — money?"

"That would be — let me see — that would be — one hundred and eighty-six dollars and forty two cents. But seeing it's all in the family, Mr. Egan, and . . . Here! Where you going?"

Egan stopped short.

"Why . . . I don't know."

"Don't *know?*" Mr. Pennypacker emitted his laugh of punctuation.

"No. I —"

"Well, can't you *say* something? Here I've sat up and waited. . . . Can't you say whether it's a trade or not, or whether you'll think it over, or something?"

"Yes . . . of course," said Egan apathetically. "I . . . I'll think it over."

XIV

IN the morning, Egan was doubly penitent, and doubly demoralized. His utter surrender to the resentment arising out of Henry Luke's revelation afflicted him, when viewed in perspective, with cold shivers. A residue of anger still remained to him, but it was anger directed chiefly towards himself.

Half-dressed, he sat soberly considering the potential results of his mad impetuosity. What had he accomplished by it? Why, he hadn't even convinced Henry Luke!

Presumably, he could come to terms with the agent, if he wanted to, but even so, he couldn't come to terms with himself. But was it the right thing to recant, now? Was it advisable for him, after one childish blunder, to prove Henry Luke's case for him by going around and selling that car back to the agency? Wouldn't that fan a greater flame of gossip than ever?

Granted that Henry had goaded him into blind rashness; that was simply an explanation, and not an excuse.

To think that he, who had regarded himself as so capable and so clever, had stultified himself like that! The mere visualization of that poor little car afflicted him with nausea. What would Martha Henderson think of it, if she knew? What would Judge Perkins say, when he *did* know?

As he tardily continued dressing, he realized that he

had a headache. He also realized that he didn't want to face Mr. Pennypacker across the breakfast table.

Out to the open air went Egan, and like the morning schoolboy, crept at snail's-pace unwillingly towards the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue. It never occurred to him to drive downtown; he walked. He had no predetermined course of action; he was turning over in his mind a number of unsettled possibilities. He wondered if he could save his face by agreeing, perhaps, to run the car for a thousand miles, and then turn it in at a fixed price.

For a single instant he reflected upon the desirability of getting out of the transaction altogether. He might force the issue by stopping payment on the check. But he dismissed the conception as another folly. He had discounted his intelligence to a sufficient extent already. The sale had been made in good faith, and the least he could do was to play fair.

He was within a few yards of the fatal corner before he realized that it was Sunday, and that the agency would be closed.

He went slowly over to the Plainfield House, and as he breakfasted, he could see Martha Henderson's face when she comprehended how badly he had used her counsel. He could fancy how, if the news got out in an unfavourable setting, it would seriously handicap him as a promoter. No one would assume that any stability of character was in him. He told himself fiercely that never again would he boast about what he was going to do — no, not even after he had done it! But the present contingency was more important than his future

ethics. To keep the car would be to place himself, within a few days, in the position of an insolvent; to return it, would be to bring down ridicule upon his aching head. In either case, he was fair prey to criticism, and discredit.

His appetite failed him. He paid his reckoning, and went out again. He didn't want to go home, for he should find Perkins, and Adams — and Pennypacker! — there. He didn't want to walk, for fear of meeting some one he knew.

Aimlessly, he wandered through the silent streets of the business district, until, with all the sentiments of a criminal returning to the scene of the crime, he was impelled to turn his footsteps towards Vine Street.

From the lawn, Mary hailed him cheerfully.

"Hello, J. Pierpont!"

"Hello," said Egan.

"When are you going to ask me out for a ride?"

Instinctively, he put on a smile of gracious ease. "Any time you say."

"This afternoon?"

"Name the hour."

"Half-past four."

"Right!" said Egan. "I'll come for you."

And went on home, and deliberately took the little car out of the barn, and parked it at the curb.

It was on that same morning, immediately after the breakfast which Egan had escaped, that Mr. Ganzenberry cut off Adams' retreat before he could leave the dining-room.

"Come upstairs!" he said in an undertone. "I've got something to show you."

Adams, following him, and not being gifted with premonition, was bored. They went into the artist's room, where Mr. Ganzenberry promptly dived into a huge portfolio.

"You're such a good art critic," said Mr. Ganzenberry, concealing the canvas until he had finished his preliminary address, "I thought I'd ask your advice. You see, I never was the least bit — commercial. But I hear these commercial artists . . . well, this is a sort of pot-boiler. And I thought as long as you know so much about these things, you'd tell me who'd be likely to be interested in it, and . . . er . . . and about how much I ought to get for it." He turned the painting. "It's for the cover of a magazine," he said.

Adams looked at it, and then looked closer.

"That's pretty realistic," he said.

Mr. Ganzenberry giggled. "Well, it ought to be."

Adams looked more closely yet. "Those are pretty nearly regular portraits."

Mr. Ganzenberry bridled. "Well, I suppose I was some influenced . . ."

"But that wasn't from life?"

"Yes, and no. It . . . er . . . it made an impression on me at the time. I didn't intend to portray the actual faces of the . . . er . . .participants, but if some resemblance has crept it, why — you know what they say about the artist's memory."

Adams looked at him keenly.

"Something like this actually happened, did it?"

"Oh, yes. But that's neither here nor there."

"When was it, Mr. Ganzenberry?"

"Saturday week."

"And in the reception room. Gracious! How well you've done it."

Mr. Ganzenberry blushed. "If you think the faces are too recognizable, I'd better paint over —"

"Oh, no. Not at all." Adams stepped back for a clearer view. "To you and me, of course — understanding art as we do . . . How much did you expect to get for it, Mr. Ganzenberry?"

"Why, I wondered . . . I think it's worth fifty dollars, don't you?"

"Y-e-e-s. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you fifty dollars for it myself."

The artist was joy-smitten, but doubtful. "Why, whatever could you do with it?"

"Oh, I can use it in my business," said Adams, casually. "It has a universal appeal — yes, I could use it myself very nicely at that price."

"Oh, but in that case, I *had* better change the faces a little more. I —"

Adams gently relieved him of the canvas. "Nonsense. Nobody but you and I'd ever know the inside of it. And *I* wouldn't have, if any one but you'd done it. You and I see deeper into these things. I don't believe any one else would ever stop to think whether these people in the painting look like actual folks, or not. They'd take 'em for figures — not folks."

"That's so. Of course, I'd hate to have anybody think. . . . Are you sure it isn't too true to life?"

"Positively," said Adams, with the picture under his arm. "I'll bring you down a check in two minutes. And a bill of sale to sign — so it'll be all regular."

XV

IT was on a baking afternoon in August, gratefully near dusk, when Martha Henderson, strolling leisurely down the shady side of Main Street, met Egan to face to face.

"Why, Lieutenant Egan!" she said. Her eyes, wandering to his cravat, stayed there, fixed on the gold safety-pin he was wearing.

"Miss Henderson! Of all things! When did you get here?"

"Yesterday, for another week with Mary. How's everything?"

"Everything? That's a good deal to answer. But most things are fine."

"How's the express company?"

"Beautiful, thank you. I'm more convinced than ever it was the right thing to do."

"I told you so, didn't I?"

"I know you did. And I've often wished you could have a share in it yourself."

"Oh, I'd love to!" she exclaimed. "And if I were a man —"

"You'd want to help run it," he finished for her. "I know. Well, it's a fascinating scheme."

"You're getting plenty of people to subscribe for stock?"

"Well, not as many as I'd like, of course." He didn't think it necessary to tell her that he was strug-

gling desperately to dispose of a few thousand dollars' worth in advance, so as to keep his head above water.

"I wonder," she said, reflectively, "if my father wouldn't be interested in a plan like that. He's only a boy, anyway. I've never thought of mentioning it to him. I wonder why I don't speak to him about it."

Egan winced. "Do you want to do me a very particular favour, Miss Henderson?"

"Of course I do."

"Then promise me that you won't ever breathe a single word of it to your father."

Her eyebrows lifted. "Why, how extraordinary!"

"No, it isn't, really. I just don't want you to. It's ever so good of you to think of it, but —"

"Certainly I won't, if you don't want me to," she said. Suddenly her eyes widened.

"Oh! Of course, I know that he and your father weren't awfully good friends, but is that any reason for you to feel the same way — is it? I'm sure you don't feel that way about me, do you? I'm not offended, Mr. Egan, but I'm just a little bit hurt. You've never even met him, have you?"

"Oh, yes, I've met him; but it isn't that, honestly. I — well, I just wish you wouldn't."

"Then I won't," she said, pleasantly enough. "But I'm certainly going to bring you two men together and let you find out for yourself what he's really like. . . . What are you doing now? I'm to meet Mary at the milliner's, and go home with her. Why don't you come, too."

"Did you ride down, Miss Henderson?"

"No; we walked."

"I left my car over by the Lawyers Building. If you'll wait — or maybe we'd better find Mary first. Where is this milliner's?"

The milliner's was in the same block, and Mary was waiting and comforting herself by her reflections in a triplicate mirror. She greeted Egan without restraint, and demanded praise for her new hat — and got it.

"Now what?" he inquired.

"Aren't you busy, Bronson?"

"Not when you're around," he said.

It appeared that Mary was bent on iced refreshments, but she declined Egan's invitation to patronize the tea-room of the Plainfield House. "We'll all go up and sit on the lawn," she declared, "and have things there. Save your pennies for gasolene, Bronson!"

Egan flushed, laughing. "I never could understand," he said, "how people fuss so about gas. *I* always said that if a man has to bother over that much, he hadn't ought to own a car, anyway. But if you're talking about depreciation — that's different." Nevertheless, as he hurried over for the runabout, he thought privately that Mary might have been a little more tactful.

On the short drive to the Kents' house he found himself marvelling once more at the likeness between the two girls. They had the identical colouring; the features, almost, of twins; they were even dressed similarly in blue georgette crêpe. Mary was a living miniature of Martha. And yet, when they were together, he involuntarily made comparisons. It was hampering to him to realize that the comparisons weren't all in Mary's favour.

"Getting lots of subscriptions, Bronson?" asked Mary.

Egan nodded. "Some. I'm having to do it all alone."

Martha looked at him critically. "Aren't you afraid some one else may start a company first? They're doing it all over the rest of the country."

"That's exactly what I *am* afraid of. But you see, it's such a mixed-up sort of proposition. Before you get your ships, you've got to have at least your terminal fields. I've got options, but they don't last for ever. Then you've got to have some sort of hangars and shops. I've got estimates, but that's all. You've got to engage pilots and mechanics. You've got to have supplies and spare parts. And that takes money."

"Very much money?"

Egan was serious, but not solemn.

"A good deal. Originally, we thought we could start on a shoestring, but it doesn't look as though that would be worth while. It would be too easy for somebody else to come along with big capital and swamp us. We want six ships — and we'll need six to insure a regular schedule. After we get a rep for reliability, we won't be afraid of competition. Well, there's no use contracting for anything until the money's in sight, and if we wait until we've got money it may take six months or more to collect the equipment and lease the fields and get the building done. So you see it's as bad as a jig-saw puzzle. We need a hundred thousand dollars at the minimum."

"Wouldn't it have been better," asked Mary, "for

you to have gone and got a position with one of the Eastern companies first, and learned something about it, before you tried to go into it as a business? "

"I want to stay in Plainfield," said Egan, and Mary blushed.

At the house, Mary vanished in search of a maid to brew what she called the "cooling drafts," and Egan and Martha were left on the red-bricked loggia.

"When I asked you how 'everything' is," she said, guardedly, "I meant *everything*."

Egan somehow didn't care to talk about it.

"Aren't you and Mary good enough friends so you know already? "

"Not quite good enough for that, I'm afraid."

"Still, you're supposed to have intuitions —"

"Oh, yes. I have."

"Useful ones? "

"Perhaps." She looked at him steadily. "I don't believe you're entirely out of it, even yet. Not if you keep on fighting."

"I've been keeping at it the best I can."

"Sure? "

"Perhaps not the *very* best —"

"Oh! That's too bad. Why not? "

He was impelled to blurt out the truth to her, for she seemed to expect it. But there wouldn't be time.

"I've been too confoundedly quick, I guess."

"Still, I don't believe you've done anything to hurt your — your case, Mr. Egan. And I'm sure I'd know it if you had."

Egan sat motionless.

"Why do you think I've still got a chance? "

"I feel it, that's all."

"If there should be," he said, "my promise holds good. And I'm still hoping."

"I — don't think I know what promise that is."

"You can guess," he said evasively.

"Not what you promised me?"

"No. What I promised *her*. You know."

"No, I don't. Truly. Unless it was to wait for her —"

"That's it."

"Oh!"

"The strongest principle I ever had was not ever to break a promise, even to myself," said Egan. "That's the way I was brought up. I don't say things unless I mean them literally."

She delayed her comment.

"Then why haven't you kept your agreement with me, Mr. Egan?"

His first impulse was to protest vigorously; his second made him feel guilty.

"Did I ever make one?"

"Not in so many words, perhaps. What were all those things you were going to learn for me?"

"I suppose I *have* got a temper."

"It isn't temper, Mr. Egan."

"What do you think it is, then?"

"Aren't you confessing it to yourself this minute?"

"Are you thinking about the . . . that car of mine? Did any one tell you about that?"

"Yes, and what's been printed in the *Times* about you. It would hurt you horribly if anything came up to spoil your plans now, wouldn't it? You're so . . .

so headstrong. I didn't think you'd forget so soon."

Egan was genuinely abashed. "I do wish you lived here," he said. "I wish I could see you oftener . . . I care more about having you think I'm . . . the deuce of it is that Mary hates to have me pay so much attention to you when you *are* here."

"P-pay attention to *me!*"

"Yes," said Egan. He entirely forgot that any moment Mary might emerge from the house. He forgot his hardiest resolutions regarding her. He forgot everything except this — that in place of his old attachment for Mary, in place of the emotions which for four years had endured within him by reason of sheer momentum, there had arisen now a sudden new series of desires. That momentum of desire for Mary had run its course; he still cared deeply for her, but he felt that he had grown beyond her. His impetuosity of that first evening was the final forward movement. Her character engendered great affection in him, but little respect, little admiration — especially since he had come to know Martha. Martha was the only girl who had ever taken a true impersonal interest in him for his own sake. The only one to whom he had ever wanted to admit his faults. The only one whose judgment had ever sunk into his thoughts. He knew that his recent escapade, which had struck Mary as delicious comedy and a horse on Henry Luke, wouldn't be funny to Martha. He wished that he had time to tell her about it, and ask her what to do. "She doesn't like it at all," he said lamely.

"But, Mr. Egan,— doesn't she know we're only good friends?"

"I'm not sure that I do myself."

She looked at him with perplexity, not unmixed with alarm.

"I hope I haven't made a mistake to be so outspoken, Mr. Egan."

"No. But it won't do any harm for you to realize — I hope it won't do any harm for you to realize — that if it weren't for that promise — if I could only come to see you, and talk to you —"

His intonation betrayed the meaning of all that he didn't say. She was instantly on her feet. "Oh, Mr. Egan!"

Egan rose as swiftly. "I'm not being treacherous, Miss Henderson, or even unfair. I just want you to know that if I can't always do exactly as I'd like to, it isn't because I wouldn't if I could."

"But don't you see that when you talk like that, you're making it impossible for me to stay any longer with Mary? Don't you see that? I can't come here any more, and be a guest in her house, knowing what you've just said. It wouldn't be right for any of us. *Why* did you ever go and —"

"All I've said is that I wish I —"

"Don't say any more — *please!* It's bad enough now."

"Bad?"

"I mean . . . oh, Mr. Egan! Why couldn't you have waited? You make me feel like a spy in Mary's house!" Her distress was increasing. "This isn't being friendly to her, or to each other, and I wanted so much to have you for a friend."

"I intend to keep my promises to both of you. I did

when I made them. But is there anything criminal in my . . . in my caring something for you, too? Is there anything wrong in wanting to see you, and talk to you? When you've been so splendid about everything?" He made a great effort to free himself of the complications. "I could do that, even if I were . . . married. Couldn't I?"

She shook her head. "Oh, I'm sorry I met you this afternoon at all! I'm sorry I came to see Mary again. If I'd dreamed you —" Meeting his gaze at last, she trembled. "I'll have to go back home tonight, now. No, not tonight — it might make Mary suspect — but tomorrow, tomorrow."

"Miss Henderson! I haven't made you do that!"

"Yes, you have. . . . And I'd looked forward so to seeing you again. . . . How can I stay here, if just my being here might make something between you and Mary? How can I act towards her, when I know both sides of it? How can I be hypocrite enough to try to . . . to make things come out right? Don't you *see?*"

Egan stiffened. Argument was useless. "Can't I come to see you in Dayton?"

"No."

"That wouldn't be fair, either?"

"No. Oh! You've done exactly the same thing over again — over and over and over. And I thought you'd remember! I really did! And you've spoiled our own friendship — and maybe mine with her! Why couldn't you have waited?"

Egan caught the sound of a closing door at the house.

"Sit down! Sit down!" he said peremptorily. "Here's Mary!"

The subsequent hour was in the nature of a little triumph for Mary. Egan, she observed, could hardly control his voice when he spoke to her, and his eyes were significant. Martha was evidently subdued by her own inferiority of fascination. For Egan scarcely looked at Martha, even when, toward dinner time, he took his rather brusque leave.

XVI

BY the first of September, it was commonly said by those older men who prided themselves on being practical, that Egan was "queer." The mere mention of his scheme for aerial transportation was good for a laugh in almost any company. It wasn't, of course, that the scheme was so impossible in itself, but it was queer that a man with no more experience, with no more backing, and with no more prestige than Egan should expect to float it. It showed that Egan was a block off the old chip; and that his confidence in himself amounted to foolhardiness. The same gentlemen who, under their glass desk-pads, kept little cards reading "It Can't Be Done — But We Did It!" and other slogans of like purport, poked fun at Egan for his vaunting ambition, which they called "cheek." One of them said jocularly that the only trouble with him was that he hadn't learned to consume his own smoke.

Any of the serious-minded pioneers of industry could have foretold his disappointments, for the routine is as unchangeable as human nature. The order of events is first, scoffing at the plan, secondly, scoffing at the combination of the plan and the man; finally, ridiculing the pioneer on intimately personal and immaterial grounds.

Time and time again Egan would sketch for a prospective investor the world's activities in conveying pas-

sengers and express by air. He dilated on the Paris-London line, with its famous transport of a grand piano across the Channel, to show just what could be done; and its passenger schedule which originally went into operation for the convenience of the British members of the Peace Conference. He recited the history of the Aircraft Manufacturing Company of Great Britain, with its service, already active, between London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Newcastle, Wales, and Ireland. He dilated upon the Paris-Alsace air lane, used with instant success. He quoted the published announcements of the American Express Company, dating as far back as January, 1919. He mentioned the transatlantic trip of Commander Read, and of the Vickers Vimy bomber, and of the R 34. He expanded upon commercial beginnings in Canada, Australia, Italy, Brazil, Sweden, and even China.

"As usual," he said, "we developed the thing, and now we're letting every other country in the world beat us to it. And it's only for the lack of support from men like you."

But when the theory was admitted, the next point of negation was always the point of Egan's youth, and the next after that was always the very fact which he was trying so hard to obviate — his lack of capital.

"Yes," he said to one particularly obstinate listener, "a lot of people talk just that same way. They tell me to interest some other men first, and then come back. It's like telling a boy to stay away from the water until he knows how to swim."

He had been disagreeably astonished to discover that the plan didn't sell itself; but he consoled himself by

arguing that it was for lack of publicity. After the Fair, the public would snap hungrily at it. He was positive of this; so positive that it had shamed him scarcely at all to keep his little runabout, and to borrow a few hundred dollars from the Honourable George. Conjointly with Adams, he had prepared a careful prospectus, accurate, conservative, and, he believed, unanswerably convincing. But he had managed to secure no cash subscriptions at all, and he had been able to wring pledges of only eleven thousand dollars, with every cent conditional upon his raising infinitely more. These pledges came from personal friends of his father, and there was nothing whatsoever from Mr. Pennypacker. But even at this stage, he never distrusted his ability to organize and administer the vast concern which would render his father's corporation insignificant by comparison. He never doubted that eventually he should stand among the immortals of swift achievement. These men who listened to him now and refused their aid, would later sit down of an evening to figure out what fortunes they had lost by their obstinacy. He rather contemned them for their stupidity. As to the men of his own age, men whom he had lavishly entertained and cleverly talked to without result, he thought them merely immature.

To the vast relief of both Judge Perkins and Little Johnny Jones, he had finally consented to hold the insurance company in abeyance, pending the organization of the more important project. He hated to relinquish it, and nothing but the report of the State Commission, offered in evidence by Johnny, had induced him to shelve it temporarily. It had seemed so timely, and so novel,

and it was all his own conception, too. But Johnny had craftily shown him the pitfalls, demonstrated the need of large capital, and reminded him that any of the large casualty companies could, by merely undertaking the writing of aerial risks in addition to their other lines, compete at tremendous advantage, and Egan had presently yielded.

"Just until we can get loose from the transportation company, though," he said warningly.

To the transportation venture itself, the Honourable George was still flatly Missourian, but Egan had got him the report of the British Parliamentary Committee on Civil Aerial Transport, and furnished data on eleven organizations already in the American field, and the old lawyer had grudgingly conceded that Egan had a perfect right to hazard his own money on it.

They had made it a very modestly capitalized concern, with Egan and the Honourable George and Uncle Stanley Adams the directors.

"I've heard from my friend in Buffalo," said Egan, "and they'll ship me an H on ten days' notice. After the Fair, we can sell all the stock we want to, and buy the rest of the ships."

"Got your concession from the Fair Committee yet?" asked the Honourable George.

Egan hadn't, but he promised to set about it straightway. "There can't be any hitch there," he said confidently, "so I guess it's pretty nearly time to start up the publicity, and get my license from the Joint Board in Washington."

Accordingly, Uncle Stanley Adams started up the publicity in the Plainfield *Times*, and Plainfield — or

that part of it which hadn't previously shared the knowledge of Egan's dream — it gasped. Even people like Henry Luke took a different attitude, because of the direct and positive statements in the press. For the moment, Egan's repute swung backwards, and locally he was almost a hero again. His civilian license duly arrived, and the *Times* ran a column and a half on the front page, with a half-tone of Egan in his Lieutenant's uniform.

Late one afternoon in the week before the Fair, he came wearily into the Honourable George's office, and sat down hard in the nearest chair. His mouth was very firm and straight, and his eyes had metal in them.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Honourable George quickly.

"Big trouble," said Egan, rubbing his forehead. "Eddie Macklin."

"What's he done now?"

"Done?" Egan shrugged his shoulders. "Did you know he's on the Committee of the County Fair Society? I didn't. Well — they've refused to give me space, that's all."

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Not really? Is that a fact! Well, don't you give up, Bronson! Maybe we can use some influence and —"

"No use. No use at all." Egan laughed hollowly. "They must have jumped as soon as we ran that first stuff in the *Times*. They must have gone at it hammer and tongs. Anyway, they've gone and made a contract with another flyer — oh, they were as polite as could be; Eddie wasn't in the office; they showed me the contract — and it's an exclusive privilege. And that's the

end of it. There isn't another decent landing field within three quarters of a mile. It's all farms under cultivation. The infield of the race track is all there is. That's what I'd counted on. And even if I tried to run it outside the grounds, enough people to make it worth while wouldn't travel three quarters of a mile on their own initiative — not in Fair week. And a couple of thousand dollars' profit wouldn't be anything — it wouldn't hardly pay for the risk. I wouldn't make enough to pay for the ship — even figuring on selling it to the transportation company afterwards. The whole point was having it take off and land inside the grounds, where everybody could see it close up. We're cooked."

The Honourable George endeavoured to conceal his relief.

"Even so . . . well, that was only a grandstand play anyhow, Bronson. I wouldn't feel so bad about it, if I was you. I never did approve of it, and I told you so. It's too bad, if you'd set your heart on it, and it's dirt mean of Eddie if he had anything to do with it, but why don't you wipe it off the slate, and begin to work on the main scheme?"

"With whose money?" inquired Egan presently. "You see, I'd counted on putting up close to five thousand myself. That would have got us started. That was for the first bunch of expenses. Maybe that sounds a little wild, but I thought I could do it. I figured I could get a change pilot for little or nothing, and we'd get in 'way over a hundred hours before the Fair closed. At a dollar a minute. And the expenses would be practically nothing. Now *that's* blown —" He exhaled prodigiously. "Hang it, it's a lot worse having

it killed now than it would have been if I'd tried it, and fallen down. I hate to get throttled off like that — but the worst of it is that I won't ever know whether the darned scheme would have paid or not. Like losing a golf ball — you don't care so much about losing the *ball*, but you hate to *lose* the ball. Well — it's all off. We're buffaloed. Forget it. . . . What can we do about the transportation company?"

"It begins to look to me, Bronson, as though you'd have to depend entirely on outside capital."

"It does to me, too."

"I'm awfully sorry I can't see my way clear to . . . I'll help you every bit I can, and I'll do your legal work, and be a director, but somehow I can't let you have that money myself; I'm positive you'd go lose it. It isn't stinginess, either. You can have all I've got if it's for you, Bronson — for you to live on, if you need it — but not for those cussed flying machines. I don't trust 'em."

"I know." Egan was very subdued. "I don't blame you, Uncle George. That's your way of looking at it. But of course that may be just the thing that'll prevent me from interesting anybody else. We've got to consider that possibility, too. People would naturally want to know how much we three are in for. Practically everybody I've seen has asked me that, as it is. And that *added* to the fact that none of these people have seen much flying, and I was counting so much on the Fair for publicity —"

"True." The Honourable George scratched his head. "You've got to get outside capital to start with. If you can't get it, you'll just have to let the

thing slide. I'll back you to the limit in any ordinary commercial proposition, but this is one too many for me. And just the same, I hope you get it going, and make it succeed so well I'll look like an old fool."

Egan bristled. "You don't think I'm licked, do you? I tell you, I'm going to start it, and I'm going to run it, and I'm going to control it, and I'm going to put it over no matter *what* happens. That's settled."

"How are you going to live in the meantime, though? Sell your car?"

Egan had the grace to blush. The Judge had never once criticized him for his extravagance.

"I've been thinking it over while we've been talking, and I've got a plan that ought to work out very nicely. I thought if I could land something that would just pay my running expenses, and leave me time enough to talk this transportation scheme with people who have money, there wouldn't be so much of a rush about it. Then when we've got enough guarantees to go ahead with —" He broke off as the door ripped open to admit Stanley Adams, very red of face, and prodigiously out of temper.

"Hello, Adams. Come on in," invited the Honourable George cordially.

Egan gestured towards the reporter. "Come and listen to this, Uncle Stanley. I'm telling what I'm going to do next. The Fair Committee —"

"I know all about that," said Adams, shortly. "The infernal cut-throats!"

Egan looked at him inquiringly. "Well, I'm not going to cry about it, so I guess you don't need to. Eddie's having his inning: ours'll come later. For-

tunes of war, that's all. I'm just telling what I want to do. I've got a heap of interesting war stories, and I know this town about as well as anybody else does — I don't see why I couldn't act as a sort of special writer for the *Times*, to tide me over for a while, do you? I wouldn't want much; say, thirty or thirty-five dollars a week. Uncle George'll loan me the rest. And that'll give me time enough to —"

Adams interrupted him savagely. "Seen today's *Times?*"

"Why — no."

"Here's one. Just off the press." He flung it towards Egan, who eventually had to get up and retrieve the damp pages from the floor. "First page — top of fourth column — boxed — you can't miss it."

He began to pace the floor impatiently while Egan unrolled the tightly creased journal, and found the place. He halted, and glared at Egan. Egan read, blanched, and without a word, walked over and put the sheet before the Honourable George.

DON'T LET YOUR CHICKENS FLY BEFORE THEY'RE HATCHED

The *Times* announces with regret, not unmixed with a soupçon of grave humour, that the promised — yea, the trumpetingly heralded — exhibition flights during Fair Week will not be made by our youthful townsman, Mr. Bronson Egan. Nor does it appear, now that the truth has emerged from hiding, that Mr. Egan will have the opportunity of carrying voluntary passengers towards Heaven at the rate of about two cents a foot, which was his avidly concealed intention, not included

in his published utterances. Indeed, Mr. Egan, who was but recently discharged from the Air Service, seems to have promptly enlisted in the Hot Air Service, and placed himself on active duty in our too gullible midst.

The facts — the official, incontrovertible, copper-riveted facts — are that Mr. Egan, despite the communiqués emanating from him during the last few days, will not fly at all during Fair Week (which, under the usual misnomer, will last a fortnight). What other essentials he neglected to provide for, we cannot say, but he certainly neglected to arrange for a concession covering the use of the race track, and his various statements to the *Times* were therefore without the slightest authority. In the meantime the Fair Committee had already corresponded with, and actually contracted with, ex-Lieutenant R. C. Utley, who formerly held the American record of 135 consecutive loops. Mr. Utley will fly daily, stunting at 10:30 A. M. and 3 P. M., and taking up passengers between times at a reasonable figure, all for the profit of the Fair, and not for any individual.

This correction is printed at the request of the Fair Committee, in justice to it, and to Mr. Utley, and — it may be with reverse English — to Mr. Egan.

The Honourable George laid down his spectacles tenderly, and nursed his knees.

"Who wrote that, Adams?"

"A little squirt on the city staff. I didn't see it until it was off the press — damn it!" He turned on Egan. "What was that pipe-dream you had a while ago? Get you a job on the *Times?* After that? Well, not exactly." He snorted violently. "What

I'm worrying about is where *my* next job is. I'm going to need money myself, and need it bad."

"Did you quit?" asked the Honourable George, with a glance for Egan, who was standing in abject silence at the window.

Adams motioned belligerently.

"I didn't have time. They fired me." He displayed the knuckles of his right hand. "I did that on the chap who wrote it. He's got a glass jaw. The old man's got a kick left in him yet, by thunder! And they — that's the only thing I'm sorry for — they fired me before I could stop stuttering long enough to quit. I'm through, and I'm glad of it."

Egan turned back from the window.

"It's going to be darned hard sledding for me to sell five dollar gold pieces for sixty-nine cents apiece after that," he said. "But I'm going on trying to put that company over until I'm dead,— hear me?"

Judge Perkins cleared his throat. "Stanley," he said, "don't you think it's pretty near time you showed Bronson the best way to go about getting a job?"

XVII

THE billboards of the city had changed, in the last few months, that percentage of their blazoned appeal which had been purely patriotic. Except for a few neglected corners, pathetic in their belated insistence upon Administration dogmas —"Food Will Win the War," "Fuel Will Win the War," "Thrift Will Win the War," "Can Vegetables and Can the Kaiser, Too," "Buy W. S. S. *Now* and Help Win the War," the spaces contributed to the Government by the outdoor advertising companies now showed a series of warnings to an already forgetful democracy. "A Job for Every Soldier, and a Soldier for Every Job," "If They Were Good Enough to Fight for You, They're Good Enough to Work for You," "Hire the Fighting Man First." But the Administration dogmas had been dignified by three-sheets, while all that the United States Employment Service could afford, now that the war was safely over, and the policy of retrenchment begun, was a modest little square not much larger than a desk blotter. The space was gratuitous, but the Government was economical even on printing.

And in spite of the message of those modest little squares, which represented a lower expenditure than any manufacturer would consider adequate to put a new brand of cigarettes or talcum-powder before the public, the democracy was edging slowly towards the business-like point of view. Publicity, and sounding slogans,

exert the best influence when they suggest something not too expensive for the average reader. Patriotism is harder to sell in peace-time than winter underwear in Borneo. And one of the very hardest things in all the world is to persuade a man to hire somebody he doesn't affirmatively want to hire.

As Egan told himself dumbly, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the leading American ace, could naturally command a lofty salary in many fields, because Captain Rickenbacker had originally been an automobile expert, and because the press had given him, for the last two years, greater publicity than ten million dollars could buy. And there was a large percentage of returning fighters like Rickenbacker for whom the billboards performed no service. Any one who had learned to command men, or learned to be a genius in paper work, or perfected himself in some non-combatant specialty, was worth more than ever to a prospective employer. But Egan had commanded no men, and learned no specialty except that in which he purposed to make himself a leader. He had no desire to ally himself with any other aircraft venture, and to be an underling in it. And there was none of these in Plainfield anyway, and he wanted to live in Plainfield.

Indeed, as Egan saw the situation, the non-combatant executive had acquired the most valuable experience of all. Men like General Guy Tripp of Ordnance Production; Colonel George Mixter and Lieutenant H. H. Emmons of Aircraft Production; Lieutenant Colonel Bingham and Colonel Walter Dill Scott, chief of Army personnel work; Colonel Vincent of the Liberty Engine and General Kenly of the Air Service and Captain

Grover O'Neill, his aide, and Captain Carroll Dunham and Major Clarence Little of the Air Service Personnel; Colonel Warren, Father of the Questionnaire, Lieutenant Colonel Bab Andrews of the Motor Transport Corps, all acquaintances of Egan or of his father; these were types of men whose non-combatant achievements gave them a hugely increased value professionally or commercially, and insured their future, whether they needed additional insurance or not. They had gained more breadth of experience in a year and a half, or two years, than twenty years of peace could have provided.

But the typical fighting pilot, as such, had made no record which any employer except the War Department or an aircraft manufacturer could rightfully set down among his *prima facie* assets. Experience in command of men, experience in administration, experience in production, experience in conservation, transportation, finance, experience in the sciences — from the holy science of medicine to the unholy science of gas defence — experience in the Service of Supply and in the all-but-civilian bureaucratic units, had a commercial outlet. Why should an employer hire as a clerk or as a general manager, an individual without the usual qualifying characteristics, habits, and tendencies, merely because the candidate had beaten off three Fokkers over the Bois d'Barricourt?

Except for the irrelevant fact that Egan had lost a great inheritance, he was in the same category with thousands of young men of the same age. He was college-trained; but the mere circumstance of having attended a few lectures at an institution operated on the assumption that youth comes to college to be educated,

has never yet borne with it the assumption of innate ability, and never should. The business of life is to make, to transport, and to sell. Egan had learned only how best to destroy.

He had won honours for cruising above the clouds, magnificent and lonely as an eagle, and equally a source of terror to his prey. Now that his feet were on the ground, he wasn't worth a penny an hour more than the boy who had stayed at home, and, after spending a few minutes on the war bulletins before dinner, studied a correspondence course in efficiency until bedtime. Indeed, he was worth considerably less.

He was twenty-five, without a single item of mental equipment to put him above the average of value of a man just strutting forth from college with diploma in hand. He was well disciplined, but the discipline was of a sort to set the brakes on his initiative. He was accustomed to military ways of correspondence, to military ways of decentralized authority, to military ways of counting lead-pencils and sometimes neglecting to count freight-cars. And his normal taste was for a commanding position in the world — a position carrying with it a good income, and a good status in society.

His misfortune wasn't in any sense his fault. It wasn't the fault of his Government. It wasn't anybody's fault; except, perhaps, that the hysterical writers of special magazine articles might have blamed it on the grandfather of Germany's last Kaiser. But it was stultifying, nevertheless. Egan would have reacted sharply to the theory that the Government, having helped to prevent him from learning how to make a living, thereby owed him one. The war had been indi-

vidualistic. He had fought not for an abstract ideal, but for a personal cause. Even if he had been drafted, he should still have felt that it was an individual proposition. It was merely his contribution towards the privilege of living among Americans. Indeed, he saw no merit in the placarded suggestion of the Employment Service to the effect that mere contact with the Army should be regarded as a sort of general reference.

He realized that the war, bringing sudden and acute demands for certain things and stifling the production of others, had arbitrarily made manufacturers richer than they had ever dreamed, or made them poorer than they had ever feared. The rich employer was still willing, in many cases, to hire discharged soldiers whether he needed them or not. It was a spectacular thing to do. Half a dozen factories in Plainfield even specialized in cripples, capitalizing the charity. The empty-sleeved veteran was already to be noted at the doorway of large buildings; it was hardly noticeable, now, whether the elevator operator wore ribbon-bars or not. By the same token, Egan could have found a place for himself in twenty minutes. He could have found it with Kent. And it would have been worth just about what it cost him in self-respect.

The dry-goods clerk who became a second-lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps and worked in a domestic Depot, the mechanic who got his chevrons for Motor Transport work at cantonment, the laboratory-worker who began and finished his service at Edgewood in Chemical Warfare, the metal salesman who broadened his knowledge and won the contumely of Congress by

living as an Ordnance officer in Washington — all these were better fitted to earn a living than they had been before. Skilled workmen were precious, regardless of their trade. But the well-born youth who would normally have gone into something cleanly and conventional — selling bonds or taking up the reins of his father's business — he had merely won conscience, and lost time. To this extent, the draft-dodger had won the inside track from him.

Egan could take his choice of twice a hundred jobs in Plainfield. A hundred and fifty of them were charity, masquerading as patriotism. Forty of them were in common labour. Nine of them were kid-glove opportunities, excellent for the high-school graduate with vanity and little foresight — white collar jobs, with nothing ahead but hard-wrung increases of a dollar a week, and eventually a jerry-built white house with two mortgages on it.

Two weeks sped past, on borrowed money, while he thought it over.

XVIII

SOCIALLY, for a fortnight, Egan had all but eliminated himself from Plainfield. It was neither out of youthful pessimism, nor out of rancour; it was neither because he was afraid, nor because he was ashamed to resume his old life; he had calmly considered the circumstances, and made a voluntary choice. The clock was his counsellor. He had no time for diversion. Society, in its common aspect, would have been a liability to him instead of an asset. Some of his none too friendly acquaintances, and some of his analytical ones, like Henry Luke, might judge that he had deliberately run to cover; and a few might even go so far as to hint that after the exposé in the *Times* he had been dropped, but Egan wasn't interested in what they thought, or said. He knew that society partakes of the distinguishing quality of a nettle. He knew that society, regarded as a more or less organized form of exclusiveness, takes its prominence not so much from the complacence of those who are a part of it, as from the tacit consent of others to be excluded — or at least their tacit recognition of the fact that excluded they are, and will be. Egan consented to no exclusion of himself, nor did he admit a cause. He knew that he could still go where he chose, when he chose. And while he was studying, and trying to make up his mind what to do, he chose to go nowhere, except to the Metropolitan Club.

At first, he hadn't recalled his vested privilege. Old

Man Egan's admission, twelve years ago, had automatically placed Bronson in nomination at twenty-one. He had been elected during his senior year at college, and Old Man Egan had paid his dues for him up to last autumn. Between graduation and embarkation, he hadn't found time to use the club, but when he first came home, he had remembered, and he had rather inferred that his long absence and failure to pay his tithes had disenfranchised him. He had asked the Honourable George Perkins about it, and the Honourable George had found out for him that members in service were exempt from dues, and that Egan was still carried on the rolls.

He had always liked the Metropolitan, and, as he became gradually aware that it had been a grave mistake for him to try to spur his sentiments by going to live at the old house on Vine Street, he fell into the habit of using the club more and more. The sense of repose he got from it was almost as refreshing as though he had been a hen-pecked benedict; he liked especially the library, high-ceiled, ruddy-lighted, almost perfectly quiet; and at the end of a long day of interviewing recalcitrant prospects on the Transportation project, or at the fag end of a futile evening of worry about personal finances and a well-paying job without too much labour attached to it, he often spent a few solitary hours there, relaxed and with a blank brain, before he went on home.

"Home" was a term which seemed to be growing less and less applicable to the house on Vine Street. Egan was minded of one of his old fraternity songs: "There Is No Place Like Home to Me — That's Why I Stay

Away." The atmosphere of it had become almost insufferable, now that Miss McCain, submerged in the depths of unrequited love, had foundered with her domestic tragedy. Miss McCain was frequently passed on the stairs, or in the hallway, and her behaviour, at such times, was irritating. She crowded the wall, like a timid fawn in the presence of a Mohock, and sniffled. Egan couldn't determine whether the sniffle was meant as a direct indictment, or as the best available substitute for a salutation, but in any event, it wasn't a happy sound. Wherever Miss McCain went, the air had an excess of moisture in it. She constantly carried a handkerchief, balled tight.

Her mother, having been a mother only once, never of a son, and never having cultivated either a sense of humour or an understanding of the irresponsibility of youth, was of military dignity and repression. Her mouth might have been ruled thin by a hot iron. Her eyes were perpetually unsmiling, and fixed on the fourth dimension. Occasionally she would find herself bobbing her head for emphasis, while she made up vitriolic speeches for Eddie Macklin. It was a little disconcerting for the spectators. She was sometimes forgetful of her duties, too, and Egan had occasion more than once to dislike his breakfast. He was sorry for her chilled heart, but he couldn't carry his sympathy over to apply to his eggs.

It was a house of drab memories for almost all its inhabitants. The kind of house which encourages no laughter at all, and causes voices to be hushed, even in privacy. In another season, it would certainly smell musty, no matter how much it was ventilated.

To Egan, the presence of the Honourable George in his old room had its drawbacks, also. The Honourable George was unquestionably ageing. His temper had frayed a little, and although he was fond of Egan, and sympathetic, he had begun to think, at odd moments, of the next life. The Honourable George, like Egan, hadn't a living relative, and philosophy is cold comfort for a man who slips into the habit of waking up at night, and dreaming of facing the end of things alone. His interest in his practice had commenced to wane, his interest in Egan's transportation company was hardly more than veiling for his fondness for Egan. He was an agnostic, and consequently a grave problem to himself in old age.

As for the other boarders, Little Johnny Jones was everybody's friend, and rarely at home. He was still making sporadic attempts to drag Egan out into gaiety with him; but when Egan wouldn't go, Johnny went alone. Adams was Adams. The disgruntled artist who ate by induction and gestured with his thumb on all occasions was merely an excitable bore. Mr. Wilson predicated his remarks upon the assumption that everybody was interested in his insomnia, his appetite, and the trip he had taken to California in 1902. Mr. Pennypacker was a thorn.

Egan would have fled the house in an instant, save for the responsibilities he felt that he had undertaken. Judge Perkins had joined the household on Egan's representations. But there was no valid reason to prevent Egan from spending his evenings at the Metropolitan Club, and whether or not he felt guilty about it, he spent them there.

He was sitting in the library one night, pawing over some magazines, when one of his conditional subscribers came up to him with a newspaper in his hand. The man was a small manufacturer who had sold nuts and bolts to Egan's father for fifteen years. He had promised to invest a thousand dollars when the rest of the subscriptions, put together, totalled a hundred thousand.

"Well," he said, "I guess that roast they gave you in the *Times* didn't hurt as much as I thought it would."

Although the matter had rarely been mentioned to him, or even hinted at, the profound disaster of Egan's Fair Week program had seriously damaged his chances for the larger glory. That article in the *Times* had carried too much of a sting in it. That sting was a thousand times more potent than a two-column destructive criticism, written in learned polysyllables, could ever have been. Most men who had read it, instinctively shied away from Egan's arguments, their minds glued to Fair Week, and the *Times*. Only those who hadn't seen it, those who denounced the *Times* as yellow, and those who believed in Egan primarily as the son of his father, had been willing to listen seriously to Egan afterwards.

"What's the idea? I don't understand you?"

"Why," said the older member. "I guess I'll have to write you a check one of these fine days, Mr. Egan, won't I?"

Egan smiled, uncomprehending. "I hope so."

"I certainly do congratulate you. I see you've taken my advice."

"Er . . . what advice was that?"

"About subordinating yourself in your scheme to older men with — ah — prestige."

"Do you mean Judge Perkins? He's been connected with me from the very beginning. I'm sure I told you that."

The older member was momentarily stumped. "I'm sure the Judge is the best man in Plainfield for his place," he said awkwardly, "but I was — I think the business men you've associated with you make it a much better proposition. I mean, from a selfish point of view. I must admit I was disappointed not to have my own name —"

"The other business men?"

"Exactly. Mr. Henderson, and —"

Egan caught at the reference.

"Say that again!"

The third of the trio stepped involuntarily backwards. "Gracious! . . . Why, I said Mr. Henderson, and —"

"*Henderson?*"

"Yes, Martin Henderson. The Dayton man. He and —"

"What on earth ever gave you the impression that he's associated with me?"

"Why, the *Herald* says so tonight, Mr. Egan. Isn't it true?"

Egan's face was a study. "It most assuredly is not."

"Why — that's curious."

"Where was this — in the *Herald*, did you say?"

"Yes. Oh, that's so. The edition was pretty late tonight. Isn't there a copy here? I just brought this

one in myself. It's on the front page — here. Right there by my thumb."

The informer strained his eyes to peer over Egan's shoulder, just as though he hadn't read the item before.

AIR TRAFFIC COMPANY ORGANIZED BY LOCAL CAPITALISTS

Plainfield Keeps up With World's Progress — and Beats Most of the World to it.

Incorporation of Air Traffic Company with capital of $500,000 assures Plainfield a prominent niche in history of aviation.

Announcement is made this morning of probably the most important single event in Plainfield since the first railroad line was completed. Leading citizens of Plainfield, without blare of trumpets, have for the past six weeks been perfecting arrangements for a large fleet of airplanes, each capable of carrying from 25 to 40 passengers, or from 3,500 to 6,000 pounds of freight.

With the assurance that these planes can be delivered by January 1, the pioneers of aërial transport in this section have incorporated the Air Traffic Company, capitalized at $500,000. It is understood that all the stock has been purchased by the incorporators for cash, and that the funds are on deposit in this city. A bond issue of $500,000 is also planned, and will be underwritten by the Citizens Trust Company and sold to local investors exclusively.

The principal officers of the company are: President, Stephen W. Luke, president of the Citizens Trust Co.; Vice-Presidents, Edward W. Richards, vice-president of the Plainfield Gear Co. and of the High Speed

Shell Co.; Charles B. Garverick, president of the Electric Foundry Company; Edwin F. Johansen, president of the Wood Products Co.; and two technical experts not yet named. The Secretary will be B. C. Boyd, president of the Plainfield *Times* Company; and the Treasurer, H. F. Hoyt, who for this purpose has resigned the treasurership of the Plainfield Motor Car Co. The directors will be the officers and, in addition, Martin Henderson of Dayton and Plainfield (chairman), S. W. King of the *Herald*, and others.

In an interview given last night to a *Herald* reporter, Mr. Luke said: "Scores of concerns will be organized during the coming year to establish aërial transport lines. We believe that the great speed of the airplane makes it a valuable means of transportation, and that people will be glad to pay extra to have their packages delivered in half or one-third the time required by other means of transportation.

"It has been estimated that aërial express could be carried profitably at a charge of $2 per pound for packages of a given size between New York and Chicago. We propose to carry packages not to exceed 50 pounds in weight at 20 cents a pound per hundred miles or fraction thereof. Immediate service will be provided between Plainfield, Dayton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, Columbus and other large centres within a radius of 1,000 miles. The size of our fleet means regular and frequent schedules and prompt delivery. Passengers will be carried at rates to be announced later."

Mr. Richards, operating vice-president, said: "Our planes, which are of the general type known as the Handley-Page, will make Chicago in less than three hours, against nine by rail. They are costing us $17,000 apiece. The life of the motors, if run throttled down, is over 500 hours of flying, but the life of

the plane itself is greater. Depreciation will therefore not be serious. We are sure we can keep our traffic down, and still make a good profit. If the public wants to know why it costs so much to run an airplane, and why our charges are therefore so high, it costs about 46 cents a mile for a mighty small one. The two low-compression Liberty engines on our planes, and other expenses, will make it cost us about 66 cents. Upkeep is the big item, and not fuel. You get four to seven miles per gallon. Salaries of mechanics, repairs and replacements are what eat up the profits."

Mr. Hoyt, Treasurer of the new company, said: "I have nothing to say except that this triumph is due to the energy and imagination of one man of whom Plainfield ought to be proud, and I regret that his name is not connected with the company except as a stockholder. All I can say is that this is the modesty of true greatness."

Mr. Henderson, chairman of the Board, said: "I first became interested in this subject by an editorial in the New York *Tribune*. It told me that you could go from London to Paris on schedule time for $75, and that the company was actually making money. I found that with aërodromes only a hundred miles apart, commercial flying is almost as safe as walking; and if your planes are bi-motored, it is safer yet. All our planes will be bi-motored. If one motor stalls, the other can pull through with no more delay than the average railroad train. In cold weather, passengers can wear the same kind of electrically heated clothing that aviators have worn for the last two years. I believe this is a tremendous thing, and I am glad to be connected with it, and to help give Plainfield a modern industry."

The temporary offices of the company will be on the

6th floor of the *Times* building. The local landing field will be on the old Rigby farm adjoining the Fair grounds. Title to this property has not yet passed, but an option on it was obtained some time ago, and will promptly be exercised. The purchase price is said to be $30,000 for 150 acres. Buildings will be constructed by the Plainfield Construction Corporation which is now engaged in completing the Sanford trolley line.

A large force of clerical employés will be required, and Mr. B. C. Boyd, Secretary of the Company, states that all applicants should refer directly to him. Mechanics, riggers, testers, trouble-shooters and labourers should apply to the office of the operating vice-president. Positions in all grades of labour will be open in seven cities simultaneously.

It is understood that applications for positions as pilots and assistant pilots will not be received, as the company has made the necessary arrangements through the Department of Military Aëronautics to secure honourably discharged pilots of the Army Air Service for this purpose.

Not only as a civic duty, but also as a source of high enjoyment, loyal Plainfielders are urged to book space for early flights. Take a trip to Chicago by air — as safe as sitting in a rocking-chair. Send your express parcels, and especially perishable goods, by air — quick, cheap, and certain. Support this most imaginative of Plainfield's industries, and watch Plainfield grow!

Egan, whose hands had shaken a trifle as he first grasped the entire purport of the article, finished it stone-cold. His jaw was set hard, and his eyes were

round and staring. The fear of rivalry had always been with him, but it had never been a really penetrating fear.

It wouldn't have been half so astounding to him if some organization of technical men had come into this field. Indeed, his fears had been based upon the assumption that only technical experts would come into it at all. He had comforted himself with the assurance that his own data, his own experience, his own missionary work in Plainfield would at least give him a pleasant entrée to such an organization, if one arose against him. The last thing he had anticipated was that local magnates, unskilled in the science of aerial navigation or of aircraft production, would plunge into action without even consulting him — without even including him.

The shock was less to his hope than to his pride. He had fancied that he knew more about aviation than any one in Plainfield. He had assumed that he was quite capable of building and directing a great organization — he didn't assume it on the basis of any profound ability; on the contrary, he thought it was too easy. It had been the sort of dream which every college senior practises in silence, or confesses towards midnight before an open fire. A golden dream of generalizations, with all the practical details left for some one else to trip over, pick up, and stagger under.

Of a sudden, he was stricken by a flashing conception of his own youth. It was exactly what his prospective clients had been saying, but he had discounted it. Youth! Younger even than youth — boyishness. Four years of service overseas had developed him not the

slightest in commercial acumen. It had merely given him an external veneering of metal. That veneering, still capable of high resistance under the stress of his anger when he came home to find his hopes despotically abolished, had gradually eroded as he passed from a military to a civilian state of mind. Successive revelations of his unimportance to the community had weakened his defence. He still had physical courage in abundance, he still had all the fighting instincts of his race, but in learning how to control them, he had necessarily had to learn when he was beaten.

He was beaten now, and he knew it. There was no possible counter-attack. He was utterly helpless in the face of this immeasurably superior power. It wasn't simply the money barrier, it was organization. Money meant comparatively little to him; organization was everything. He couldn't fight the unified capitalists of Plainfield.

The shock made him dizzy for just a moment. It had wiped out both his standing place and his perspective. His thoughts, following along those mysterious lines of suggestion which no one will ever comprehend, or can ever resist, gave him a mental picture of a gigantic bubble, shimmering blue and silver in the sunlight, and then collapsing in a lightning stroke, and floating off in a burst of silver spray for a single second before the smallest fragments disappeared, and left nothing. The bubble brought up the swift image of an observation balloon which he had seen shot down in France. The observer had promptly gone over the side, and the Fokker victor had spiralled down around the parachute, shooting at the helpless target adrift.

That was up in the Argonne. Damned unpleasant place — Argonne. Egan had flown there in the early days when the life of the average pilot was two hours in the air. It was cold. Also muddy. You stick in it like glue. Once he had got himself mired in a *camion*, going back to rest billets. The harder they tried to get out, the deeper they got in. History repeats itself. He was mired in failure.

He heard his own voice speaking. "No," he said, "that's not my company. That's something new."

"Is it indeed. Then does that mean —"

"It means," said Egan, "that I'm through. . . . Can I have that paper? Thank you."

The older man must have thought him very rude, but Egan had no thought of courtesies. All he thought of was to reach Judge Perkins as soon as he could. Perkins or Adams or Johnny Jones. Adams was the man he reached first.

At the end of the hour, the journalist tossed away his cigar and looked Egan straight in the eyes.

"I see the Interurban Trolley wants some outdoor men for gang-bosses," said Adams. "Chance to rise, and all that. It beats inside work all to pieces for a man like you, Bronson. Good pay, too. Four a day."

Egan drew a long, shuddering breath. "That's better than being bossed around by an anaemic little mutt in an alpaca coat in somebody's office," he said.

XIX

IN the library of the new Kent homestead, the laird of the manor and Eddie Macklin had almost worn a trail in the carpet around the mahogany centre table. In the first instance, it was Macklin who had done the walking, while Kent sat listening and digesting and judging. Presently, the two had been on their feet at once. Lately, Macklin had sulked in a chair while Mr. Kent became peripatetic, and diffuse.

"But merciful heavens, man!" said Kent for the dozenth time, "what were you ever thinking about? Why couldn't you keep your wits about you? As if you didn't know that a man in your position mustn't stub his toes!"

Macklin, freshly sublimated at the recollection, held up his hand for mercy. "Kent, I give you my *word* —"

"Don't bother! Haven't I said already I believe you? Those things do happen. But you and I, as men of the world, take a different slant on it from what some other people may. You know what campaign dope is, and you know what other women are. I can't answer for what Mary'll think. And you've got four people to reckon with — the two McCains and Adams and Pennypacker." He halted, impatient. "But what gets *me* —"

"You don't need to say it all over again," said Macklin wearily. "They've simply got us up a blind alley. They haven't *done* anything; they haven't *said* anything. All that's happened is that Adams came in

my own office and showed me a photograph of a drawing. He didn't make any threat at all. And you see where that leaves me. I don't know what his idea is. If I try to buy the darned thing, he can use that against us. And if I don't, he can use the picture. And he's got a job on the *Herald* now, and that's against us, anyway."

Kent stood by the window, crumpling the curtain. "The one sensible thing you've done is to come and tell me, like a man. The next thing is for you to tell Mary. If you don't, and she gets any rumour about it, you know what it's likely to be — they'll make a regular assault out of it."

"I — suppose you're right, but —"

"But *think*, man, think of the slogan they can get up about you in November. They killed a man's chances ten years ago just by calling him 'Silk-Hat Harry.' Ridicule's the sharpest sword there is — and I wouldn't guarantee that your own organization would try to push you ahead of any evidence as strong as that. Because it would kill you permanently, and weaken the organization for a long time if they tried it and lost."

"Oh, don't!" said Macklin miserably.

Kent sat down. He was angry, but not so completely angry that he could disregard the farcical side of Macklin's dilemma. "How can we stop their mouths? Those four? And prevent it from going any further — and undo anything they may have done so far?"

"We can stop the McCains', possibly."

"Well, *how?*"

"I'm pretty sure Mrs. McCain hasn't talked to any-

body yet. If she had, I'd have heard of it before this — or Mary would. Those things travel. I've got her scared to death on the stock deal; the only question is how long her scare'll last. And from what Adams said, I don't believe he's even discussed it with the McCains yet. But if I could go to Mrs. McCain, and have her assign me her stock and pay her something in real money for it —"

"Wouldn't that make her worse yet?"

"I don't think so. I *know* it wouldn't. It would clinch the thing for ever. She'd be happy to get a few thousand dollars. She isn't making expenses. And as a matter of fact, I took the liberty of hinting to her that same day that we might make some sort of dicker . . . that is, if you think it's worth trying."

"It's not worth a very great deal." Kent pondered. "But it might be a wise idea to offer her something, especially as the Egan receiver tells me the schedule looks better than it did a while ago. The stockholders may eventually get twelve or fifteen per cent. I suppose we could offer her five thousand now. Or — we might inject some human interest into it. Would it be any stronger if you went to her, offered to buy the stock for twenty-five hundred flat and — just to show your sympathy and your willingness to make amends, and all that sort of rot,— told her that you'd be glad to send the child to some Eastern boarding school for a couple of years? That wouldn't cost much. And it would get the little girl out of the way, too."

"She'd fall," said Macklin confidently. "They'd both fall. And you could buy Pennypacker with a couple of hundred dollars. But you've got to make a

clean sweep of the whole crowd, or there's no use trying it. That's why I came to you without doing any missionary work myself first. You can't reach Adams with money."

Kent began to scowl. "I can reach him with something else, though. We'll see him together. I'm not worried about Adams. I'm worried about these women."

The younger man had to be content. "Then I'll see Mrs. McCain tomorrow, shall I? And I'll go to Adams with you any time you say. Now, about election. If I should lose —"

Kent smiled meaningly.

"If I were you, I shouldn't lose."

"Oh, but I might. There's always that possibility. That's what we're talking about, isn't it? Then do I get the job of general counsel for Air Traffic as well as the Kent —"

"You're mistaken, Eddie. You can't lose. If you do, there's nothing left. You can see that, can't you?" Kent shook his head gently. His eyes were kindly, but his jaw was wicked.

Macklin wiped his forehead, and there was a short silence. "That's a little sudden, isn't it?"

"I don't think so, particularly. You've intelligence enough to understand facts. The only way you can be very useful to us is as city attorney, or mayor. Of course, I'd do all I could for you, privately, and you'd make good money, but those jobs you speak of aren't for life-nets. They're for an *ex*-mayor, perhaps, but not for a beaten candidate. Up to a few weeks ago, you had a walkover. I'm giving you something to hush up this present mess. But if that gets out, and Hen-

derson cuts loose at the same time and you fall down, why, we can't afford to do a great deal for you politically. That's axiomatic, isn't it?"

Macklin writhed involuntarily. "I'll do my best, Colonel."

"I know you will. We'd better go out now, I think. Somebody's come to call. I heard voices, anyhow."

Neither of them was overjoyed to find that one of the voices was Bronson Egan's.

During the interval before her father and her fiancé appeared, Mary had still further threatened Egan's balance. This was because, in a very docile mood, she had brought back to him a vivid recollection of what formerly she had been to him. In this mood, she was adorable. To her strictly personal charms she had added a coat of sympathy which was becoming and seductive. She had always liked Egan, and tonight, when he was so patently in need of her encouragement, she liked him better than ever.

"That was terribly too bad about the Fair," she said. "I almost cried when I read it in the *Times*. And I always wanted to ride in an airplane, Bronson."

To Egan, unexpectedly finding her in this relenting mood, the occasion was peculiarly moving. His life in Plainfield, since his release from the Army, had been highly emotional. He had gone through three months of strong reactions such as a man might have who shoots the Lachine Rapids in a canoe. Then the river of his life had widened, and slowed. This quiet, friendly conversation with Mary had swung him into a lazy whirlpool, reminiscent of the rapids, but not so stimulating.

He was excessively grateful to her; and he had no reason to suppose that she was very sorry for him.

"You will yet."

"Just once. Once is all I want. . . . You don't really believe Eddie had anything to do with putting you out of it, do you? Because he hadn't — honestly. He feels you think he did. But it isn't true. Please believe it isn't."

"I'd just as soon," said Egan. "In fact, I'd rather."

"Do you like what you're doing for the Trolley Company, Bronson?"

"Pretty well. It's handling men, and that's always good practice. And it's sort of interesting, too. You aren't dealing with anything fixed; you've got a human equation. Some men get two or three times as much work out of a gang as other men can. It's management. And there's going to be an enormous lot of construction work in the next ten years. I think it's good experience."

"Better than going with Father?"

"Yes, I think so."

"It certainly isn't very exclusive, I shouldn't think." Her voice was less critical than her words, for in reality, she was impressed by his independence.

"Neither would I. But it's out of doors, and it's sort of rough. I don't suppose you can understand why I like that. But the pleasure of getting dirty again, and feeling that you've done something that's fundamental and *real* —"

"You don't actually do any digging yourself, I hope."

"No — just boss. I'm head of a gang of about forty of the loveliest wops you ever saw. Of course, I don't pretend I like it better than doing what I'd hoped to do, but out there in the sun and wind, it —"

"I was sorry about the Air Traffic Company, too," she said. "But I don't suppose that could be helped, either. If Father had anything to do with it, of course you could have a splendid place there, and one that would just suit you. But he hasn't."

Egan was honestly glad to hear it. "Do you know if Martha's father started it, then?"

It was at this moment that the door of the library had opened and Kent and Macklin emerged.

"What's that that Martha's father started?" inquired Kent, as he shook hands.

Egan nodded politely to Macklin.

"We were talking about Air Traffic, sir."

"Oh, yes." Kent was locating a box of cigars. "Try one of these? . . . Well, sir, that man has had enough of Dayton — too much, I guess — so he's coming over here. Had you heard that?"

"Not — permanently?"

"So they say. If your father had lived, and I hadn't been in Washington these last two years, he couldn't have got a foothold here to save his life. Neither of us could stand him for a second. Martha's a friend of Mary's, and that's all. Why, it seems that he's negotiating for some land to build a tremendous plant on, and move his business over here. I understand he's quietly bought up interests in seven or eight different small concerns to use as feeders. And he's getting prices on houses in this section — I know that

for a fact. He's a fast worker, too, when he gets steam up. He'd get up at two o'clock in the morning any time to put something over on the fellow who sleeps 'til quarter past."

Egan abruptly recalled the occasion of their first meeting. "I know he would," he said. "I remember hearing that once last fall he jumped a milk-train from Dayton at three o'clock in the morning rather than wait —" He broke off to stare at Macklin, who had emitted a curious sound from his throat.

"It's all right," said Macklin. "Swallowed the wrong way. Ha-ha! Go on, Bronson. Sorry I interrupted."

"It was nothing but an illustration," said Egan.

"Go ahead with the rest of it," urged Kent, with a glance for Macklin.

"There isn't any more," said Egan, and he also glanced at Macklin, and saw something to remember.

"But you weren't here last fall. You were in France."

"Oh, a man told me about it on a train," said Egan. He laughed spontaneously. "Very interesting chap. His name was Feinberg. Not that his name makes any particular difference —"

"Hm." Kent was absorbed with his finger-nails. "How are they treating you out at Sanford, Bronson?"

"Mighty well, thank you."

"Not many men like you would have had the nerve to go into that sort of work, after the education you had."

"It was partly to deliver me from my friends," said Egan, laughing.

"And the other part?"

"Six dollars a day. I'm paying off my debts."

Kent looked at him queerly. The confession was remarkably unlike Egan.

As Egan rose to depart Macklin rose with him. "I'd better be running along, too," he observed.

"No — stay a while," said Kent, elaborately careless. Macklin stayed.

On a later evening of the same week, the two Hendersons, father and daughter, came sympathetically closer to each other than they had ever been before; and yet, specifically, they weren't on common ground at all.

For the first time in a decade, Martha had shed unexplained tears. Henderson, endeavouring to console her, found himself helpless.

"If you'd only tell me," he repeated, smoothing her hair, "maybe I could do something, Martie."

"N-nothing," she sobbed on his shoulder.

"Women in my family don't cry for nothing."

"Y-yes they do, too," she insisted loyally.

"If it's any of that infernal Kent tribe —" Mr. Henderson had noted her receipt of a letter with the Plainfield postmark.

"Don't — it isn't that! — you mustn't *say* those things —"

His touch became as femininely gentle as he could make it. "Or if it's anything to do with that Egan boy —"

"No — not that, either —"

"Well, what the mischief *is* it, then? I can't do you much good until you tell me what the matter is, can I?"

She could hardly tell him that it was the triple combination of Macklin and Mary; Mary and Egan; Egan and herself.

Mary had written her a piteous little note in which there were almost as many hints of quarrels and misunderstandings with her fiancé and her father as there were punctuation marks. And the letter had related startling facts about Egan. Egan had sold his runabout at a ruinous sacrifice to Henry Luke, resigned from his clubs, vanished from society, and taken a position so menial that his old friends spoke of it in horrified undertones. But Mary thought that he was a *perfect wonder* to stand on his own feet like that, and didn't Martha agree with her?

"What do you — think about Eddie Macklin?" managed Martha with some effort.

"That bird? He's a weak sister. Wouldn't trust him around the corner. What's he got to do with —"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" said Martha, wretchedly.

It shocked her beyond expression to realize that unless her friend patched up these quarrels and misunderstandings, and married the bird that Henderson wouldn't trust around the corner, Martha herself had probably seen the last of Egan. She knew that it was wicked to hope that the quarrels would be patched up. For if they weren't, four different people, two now and two later, were going to be disappointed in love. That was what she was crying about.

XX

FOR many days of high compression, Mrs. McCain had kept her lips tight shut on a subject very near to her, but when, out of a clear sky, a gift from the Greeks came tumbling into her lap, she felt herself physically unable to continue her silence longer. Macklin had been her counsellor. His dereliction meant that she had no one to advise her. Her distrust of him, now too well grounded to be shaken, extended even to the philanthropy which he had so unexpectedly offered her.

The loss of her counsellor made her doubly dependent upon counsel. She needed to pour out to some one the tale of all her relations with him, before she could sleep of nights. Until recently, she had gone no further than to despise him and mistrust him; but when he came to her to offer reparation, she was afraid. Her fear was multiplied by his insistence that there was no necessity of it. And because she began also to be afraid of herself, she cast about her for a substitute for Macklin, and chose the Honourable George Perkins.

A dozen times she planned exactly how she would approach him. She rehearsed her introduction. She devised stealthy little ways of exonerating herself, in case it should appear that she had done wrong. She put off the interview as though it had been an appointment with a dentist. She gathered plenty of courage at impossible times and places, only to lose it as soon as she met Perkins face to face. She wasn't afraid of

the Honourable George; she was afraid of Macklin — and of herself.

She could have cornered the Judge after breakfast any morning, but when she finally did conquer her reticence, she preferred to go to him at his office. At the first glance, he could see that he had a client for a landlady.

"I'm in trouble, Judge Perkins."

The Judge had risen, and bowed her to a chair. Now he sat down opposite her, bending forward interrogatively, and with immense kindness.

"Well, that's too bad! Suppose you tell me what it's all about."

Mrs. McCain's fingers were weaving ceaselessly.

"I don't know what to do, Judge. . . . I don't know *what* to do. It isn't for me — I'm thinking of Milly. What that girl's had to suffer! I don't know anything about these things . . . I — I hope there's nothing wrong." Her little laugh of deprecation was hollow. "You see, Mr. Macklin isn't advising me any more, since — well, for quite some time. It's so hard to understand these things alone. I've always had somebody — Mr. McCain, and then Mr. Macklin —"

The judge waited patiently.

"It's about this — one day a year ago Mr. Macklin came to me. He knew I had some money in the savings bank. He told me there was some stock in the Egan Company for sale, very cheap. It would pay four or five times as much as the savings bank would, he said. He said — Well, we all know what the Egan Company *was*. He said he was buying some himself. So I said I'd give him fifteen thousand dollars and . . .

and finally he persuaded me I ought to put everything I had in it, and I did. It was about fifty thousand dollars. I'd been getting almost forty dollars a week from the bank. I thought I was going to make a hundred. I *trusted* him so. He told me over and over I shouldn't mention it to a soul — it was some sort of influence that let him get it so cheap, and there might be bad feeling, and, maybe — you see, I don't *understand* those things. I hope there wasn't anything wrong, Judge Perkins."

"Don't you fret a mite," said the Honourable George soothingly. "Don't you fret a mite."

She sighed cavernously. "That relieves me so! Well — then before I'd ever got any dividend, I saw in the papers the Egan Company was in trouble. I said to Mr. Macklin, '*What* shall I do?' He said to wait. And the next thing I know the company had failed. . . ." She clenched her hands. "I asked him how much I could get for my stock. He said I couldn't get anything. He said he was ruined, too. He said it was more important than ever I shouldn't tell. I might even have to *pay* something for having got my stock so cheap, through his influence. At least I *think* he said that. I was too sick to remember very much. I didn't have any money. I didn't know where to turn. Then Mr. Macklin was very kind. He was always very kind. He got me the house, from the hospital, and he said the time might come when he'd do something else for me, if I'd just keep quiet. I'm only just hardly getting a living out of the house now. I'd have lost money if it hadn't been for the boarders Mr. Macklin sent me. I couldn't pay the March rent, and he loaned

me the money. When I thought of maybe having to pay something on that stock I was simply *crazy*. I didn't know *what* they could do to me. You see, I don't understand these things very well. Then — then Mr. Macklin . . . You see, I caught him . . . he was philandering with Milly. And we had a scene. And — and then he came back the other day, and he said if I wouldn't say anything about it, he'd pay back out of his own pocket a little of the money I lost, and forgive me the money he lent me in March, and send Milly to boarding school for two years, and I was frightened, Judge Perkins. He said it was just a friendly act to show he was thinking of me, and looking after my interests, but it frightened me. So — I thought I'd better come and tell you everything."

"Don't you fret a mite," said the Honourable George gently, although his brain was seething. "There's nothing in the world anybody's going to do to you. Did you take any money from him?"

"Not yet."

"Agree to take any?"

"He — he may have thought so."

"H'm! Now, how did you buy that Egan stock in the first place, Mrs. McCain? Did you go to the auction? . . . or did —"

"I gave Mr. Macklin the money. He sent me a certificate for it. Five hundred shares. He said it was worth at least three times what I paid for it."

The Judge frowned, and the widow trembled.

"Just one thing more: Did you ever sign any paper of any kind in connection with this stock?"

"I don't — know — Wait." She thought hard.

"Yes, I think I did. A little piece of paper about some kind of a meeting. He asked me to sign it. I think it just said Mr. Macklin was going to represent me at a meeting, or something. Yes, I remember it quite well."

"A proxy?"

"*That* was it — a proxy!"

The judge's smile of encouragement was more than paternal — it was patriarchal.

"There wasn't anything wrong about that, was there?" she asked apprehensively.

"Not a thing." He leaned back in his chair, and made a tent of his hands. "I'm awful sorry you didn't come to me with this, first thing. You'd have saved yourself a lot of worry. If you've told me all there is to tell, you can just put it out of your mind for good. Suppose you write me a little letter, though, and say you want me to be your lawyer, and that you haven't any other. I'd sort of like to have it with me in case I go see Eddie."

Mrs. McCain gazed blankly at him.

"Is that all you want of me, Judge Perkins? Isn't there anything for me to do but that?"

"That'll be quite enough," said the Honourable George, dryly emphatic.

XXI

IT was with swaying sentiments that Martha Henderson accompanied her father to Plainfield in early November. Her own especial reason for coming there was to select a house which could be bought, or rented, for occupancy early in the year; and ordinarily she would have had all a normal woman's pleasure in the hunt. Under the present circumstances, she was more than apathetic, for she didn't know that she cared to live in Plainfield at all. There were too many old acquaintances she would be embarrassed to meet.

Henderson brought her, however, to the best suite in the Plainfield House, and for two days fancied that she was happy. On the third morning, he had leisure enough to see through her workmanlike pretensions.

"What's biting you, Martie?" he demanded. "You act as if somebody'd run off with your smile. Isn't there anything that'll put it back? What's on your mind?"

"When was it," she asked, abstractedly, "that you decided to go into that air business?"

"Oh, a couple of months ago. What's that got to do with it?"

"I wish you'd told me then, instead of letting me find it out from the newspapers."

Henderson shook his head good-naturedly.

"In the first place, you ought to know by this time I don't bring my business home with me; and, in the sec-

ond place, I don't generally tell what I'm going to do until after I've done it. There isn't as much romance in it as you'd think. Just another investment."

"Was it your own idea?"

"Lord, no! I don't know whose it was. Richards was the man who sold me on it."

"Is Mr. Egan in it anyhow? I know he isn't now, but is he going to be?"

"That's one too many for me, Martie. I haven't anything to do with personnel. But I don't seem to remember anybody mentioning him. Why?"

Martha looked down. "Why, nothing. Only his ambition was to start something like that himself. So I took it for granted you'd have him in, sooner or later."

Henderson shook his head.

"No, the scheme he was mixed up in wasn't the same sort at all. He was going to do something or other at the Plainfield Fair, but —"

"He wanted an express company, too. He was trying to raise money for it. And" — she looked up, none too cheerily — "and he asked me especially not to mention it to you. I saw Mary Kent this afternoon; she thinks you were the man who began it. If she does, other people do. Probably *he* does. And he's working out on the Sanford Trolley line. And you can see what position that puts *me* in, can't you?"

Henderson laughed. "Aren't you making a mountain out of a molehill?"

"No."

Her father caught the overtone, and stopped laughing.

"You're afraid he'll feel as though you gave away his

bright idea? I wouldn't feel that way, if I were in your place. Anybody on earth could have started that company — or any other. He's got more sense than to feel that way."

"It isn't only that," she said; "but he oughtn't to have been left out. He'd collected the most wonderful information you ever saw, and he had costs and everything all figured out, and he's a splendid sort of man besides — and a flyer — and he's used to controlling other men, and he's from Plainfield and everybody knows him — why, you've just *got* to have him!"

Henderson had become as serious as his daughter. "It does look as though he'd be valuable. But Old Man Egan and I were as friendly as two strange bulldogs. Nobody's fault — we simply didn't get along. The boy inherited the idea that I'm a bad actor. If I should ever make him any proposition, it might have just the wrong effect."

"Well? Suppose it did? It wouldn't hurt you to make it, would it?"

He gazed searchingly at her. "Don't care whether you make a martyr out of your Dad or not, do you?"

"We owe him something."

"*I* do? How's that?"

"Not you."

"Oh!" said Henderson in mock dismay. "Confound it! Just as soon as you let a woman edge into a business proposition . . . I never knew it to fail. Oh, well! It's immaterial to me. We need a lot of young fellows, and I suppose he'd be as ornamental as anybody else. I suppose I'll have to see whether they planned to hire him or not. If they didn't —" He

paused. "Here's something else: Maybe the directors don't want him — at his price. How much do you care about his being with us? Come, now! What do you really care? Would you be willing to underwrite his salary just to make sure he gets a job with us!"

"Yes," said Martha.

Henderson pursed up his lips. His daughter had rarely been a mystery to him.

"It'd take half the income from your mother's estate. Don't be rash."

"I don't need it, anyway."

"In earnest?"

"Yes," she said. "I am. I . . . I owe it to him."

Henderson shaded his eyes with his hand as he stared across at her.

"Then you won't have to," he said. "If you feel as strong as that about it, he's as good as hired already."

"Even if the other directors —"

Henderson's mouth straightened.

"When I'm Chairman of a Board," he said, "I make decisions first, and we sometimes take a vote — afterward."

At half-past eleven in the morning, Mr. Martin Henderson, bouncing stiffly in the tonneau of his big blue touring-car, perceived far ahead of him a knot of labourers. For the fourth time since they had left the city limits, he began to pick out, from a distance, the figure of the foreman.

The country hereabouts was earthily unprepossessing. The roadway was level, raw with fresh excava-

tion, and heavily rutted. The farms on either side were impoverished; the buildings innocent of paint and of repair. A recent drought had set a crust of senna over the landscape, and the late autumn sun was slowly baking an oven-finish on it. The new rails shone brightly, blindingly out of their nest of very hard-looking ballast; Henderson didn't like to look at them.

Ahead, there were construction shacks, and great irregular heaps of crude materials. Heavy motor-trucks stood athwart the roadbed. The labourers, half clad yet dripping from none too vigorous exertion, languorously swung picks and shovels, every ear attuned to the whistle still thirty minutes away. The foreman mechanically harangued them.

Henderson, bounced up and down and sidewise over the execrable highway, managed to lean forward without losing his balance. "St . . . stop here," he said.

Obediently, the chauffeur stopped. Henderson drew a long breath, mopped his steaming face, and, reclining with a sigh of relief, watched. The foreman, indifferent to casuals, continued his steady harangue.

"Get a move on you, Giuseppe — that shovel isn't going to bite you. Three and a half feet deep over here — that right? Go sit down a minute, Angelo — you're all in. No, they won't dock you. I'm bossin' this job. Three foot five? Not enough. See if you fellows can't level that out by noon. *Andiamo! Cavalleria Rusticana! Pagliacci!*"

Half a dozen of the toilers laughed toothfully, and gestured with great breadth of expression. "Ah, Pagliacc'! Pagliacc'!"

"Same for tutti-frutti," observed the foreman.

"Hey, there! — You long-legged bandit with the green handkerchief!"

"Ah, banditt'!" chorussed the toilers gleefully.

"What's your name? Sapolio? Well, Sapolio, don't you forget I'm putting up a quarter for the first pick that strikes bed-rock. And I'll give the last one a poke in the eye — maybe. Understand? You saw the hook I landed on Pietro when he soldiered on me, didn't you? Go to it." Here he caught sight of Henderson, and, in spite of himself, started.

Henderson beckoned. "Come here a minute, young man, will you?"

At a distance of thirty feet, Egan surveyed him. Egan wasn't as natty as on the occasion of their last meeting, and he felt it. He was wearing an old pair of corduroy trousers, and an olive drab flannel shirt, open at the throat; an Army web belt and clumsy Army shoes. He was very tired and dirty, and for the day's work he received six dollars. He had been here since sunrise.

He surveyed Henderson calmly. The Egan of three months ago would have revolted sharply even at the faintest hint of patronage; but the Egan of today was a very clear-seeing young man. Presently, after just enough hesitation to betray something of what was in his thoughts, he came forward to the rich man's car.

"You look as though it wouldn't hurt you much to take a rest," said Henderson, pleasantly.

"It is different from riding," said Egan. Face to face with Henderson, he scorned him less than he might have imagined. He didn't respect Henderson, but he did respect Henderson's ingenuity. The man could

smile, too, just as though nothing lay on his conscience.

"Want to take a ride?"

"No, thanks. This is the company's time."

Henderson grinned. "I noticed you gave away some of it just now, though."

Egan glanced over his shoulder towards his gang. They had deduced that the stout gentleman in the luxurious car wasn't here on traction matters, and at the idea of Egan consorting on friendly terms with such a fat aristocrat, they frankly gaped — partly in order to soldier less obviously. Egan waved an imperious hand at them.

"You mean Angelo over by the shack? That's different. He's sick."

"Still, you took the responsibility."

"Oh, yes."

Mr. Henderson nodded. "Well, I don't mind taking some myself. I'm a director in this outfit, too. I want to talk to you."

"I think I'd better stay in this neighbourhood, thank you."

Mr. Henderson, casting about him, detected a lone tree a hundred yards away. "We'll run up under that spreading chestnut tree," he said. "You and I've got something to say to each other."

Egan gazed at him. "All right. Go ahead — I'll be right over." He turned, and went slowly back to his gang. He was puzzled by his own reception of Henderson; he wondered if he had ceased to hate Henderson, and why. He remembered something that Judge Perkins had once said: "It's been my experience," the judge had said, "that when you get to hat-

ing a man, you hate him all over. If you get to thinking a man's a villain, you think he's a villain from the time he gets up in the morning to the time he goes to bed at night. You'd think there was something shady behind it if you saw him walk into a church, or give a dollar to a blind beggar outside." Egan had indeed felt this way about Henderson. Now, he didn't. Though the man had fought Egan's father, and supposedly destroyed the loftiest of Egan's commercial ambitions, still, he didn't hate him. He merely disliked him — and wanted to know what he had to say.

"You keep on hustling," he said to his squad. "Big boss — hustle like merry diablo. Whistle blows in a few minutes."

As he went on towards the shady oasis, he was no longer conscious of his appearance. Pride was swelling in him, but not the empty pride of other days — the pride of labour. He felt infinitely more independent than when he had last seen Henderson, infinitely more aged and stable. He could even look down on Henderson. He was stronger, too; strong enough to listen to this man, and keep his temper. He wondered idly — and with no more emotion than that — if Henderson would have found it worth while to drive out from town to see him.

The chauffeur had been furloughed, and was smoking cigarettes out of earshot. Henderson made room on the seat beside him.

"I'm obliged to you for this opportunity, Egan."

"Oh, that's all right."

The big man was very considerate.

"How's everything been with you?"

Egan grimaced. "I'm not kicking."

"I suppose you're wondering what brought me out here?"

"I can't imagine."

"This Air Traffic Company."

"Oh!"

Henderson offered him a cigar, which Egan accepted, with the mental comment that it wouldn't kill him. "The only time we ever met each other before wasn't quite so politic as it might have been. I've been sort of sorry for it."

"So have I."

"Well, I *have*. You and I needn't have quarrelled. But you lit into us so quick, you know. I'm sort of peppery myself once in a while. And it was an awful hot day, you remember. But that's neither here nor there. . . . What I want you to understand is that I wouldn't do one single thing to damage you in any way, shape, nor manner. You've had hard luck enough."

"That's very kind of you."

"Now don't be hard to talk to. You know what brought me out here?"

"You've already said what it is."

Henderson waited until the screech of sirens from all the Plainfield factories had died away. "I hear you've met my daughter Martha since she's been visiting over here."

"Yes."

"I've been out of town a good bit — in the East. I haven't had much time with her this summer. That's how she could visit here so long. And that's why I didn't know until today you'd had any air plans up

your own sleeve. I didn't know it until she told me. And she'd never mentioned it until today."

"Indeed."

"Yes, sir. I don't know whether I'm like other men or not, Egan, but I don't hardly ever take my business home. I don't believe in bothering women with a whole lot of junk they have to try to understand whether they want to or not. And when I go into a proposition that's got a smell of novelty in it, I don't stand for a word of it creepin' out 'til after it's served up so tight it can't break. So it wasn't 'til today, when Martha told me you'd been scouting around —"

"You don't mean to say you didn't know I'd been scouting around?"

"Well, I didn't know much about it. That's a gospel fact. I didn't know you had any transportation ideas. You might have planned some kind of an exhibition scheme — a flying circus, or — *I* didn't know. That's gospel truth."

"I'll take your word for it."

Henderson felt that he was making little headway.

"So Air Traffic put a crimp in you, did it?"

"I don't know that I'd call it that, exactly; but it meant a whole lot to me."

"This — job you've got here isn't what you think is your limit, is it?"

"Meaning what?"

"I mean, are you satisfied?"

"What would you judge?"

"I'm asking you."

"Then I don't know whether I'm satisfied or not."

Henderson deliberated. "I guess I won't beat

around the bush. If I'd known you had any interest in this air game, I'd have tried to let you in for a piece of ours. You're qualified, fast enough."

Egan laughed. "As one of your pilots?"

"Better than that. Director of Flying Operations, or something on that order."

"Are you actually offering me a place in your company, Mr. Henderson?"

The stout man gesticulated.

"Wait! I don't want you to make any snap decisions. I don't want you to go off half-cocked. Take time on it. Don't say a word. Now, listen: you're a scrapper, and that counts one for you. You know the air game. You've had ideas. You've bossed men. You've had military training. I came out here to try to make you see we hadn't —"

"Was this Air Traffic Company your own scheme?"

"No; they got it up two or three months ago, out here. I came in later. They put it up to me when I was off in New York; I got some advice, and decided to go into it."

"But you're speaking for the group?"

"I'm speaking as chairman of the Board of Directors. I haven't talked to any of the others of 'em since this morning, and I don't have to. When a crowd wants me for a director, they want me for a *director*. Listen; you're in the position lots of men with good ideas get in. Big capital comes along and swamps you. And in this case, it may be lucky for you it did. You wouldn't have had a Chinaman's chance to make a success of it. You'd have busted, just as sure as fate.

Not because you're no good — but because you aren't good enough to be a big executive yet. In the right place, you'd be a valuable man. I don't believe this is the place, out here on a buckaroo's job. I want you to take plenty of time to think this over. A couple of days, anyway — more if you want. You're not an experienced man except for one class of work. That's where you're valuable; that's where you'll get the most money. You can come with us and be Director of Flying Operations at three thousand. You'll have a good, fair try-out. If you make good, we'll fix it easy for you to grab off some stock, and if you earn the promotion, pretty soon you'll be junior vice-president, and a Member of the Board, yourself. That's what's ahead of it. It's worth thinking over. Suppose the worst occurs, and the company don't pay. If you've done well, you'll have made a reputation with the heads of the biggest concerns in Plainfield. You'll have a future. And I'm not here to throw you any sops or any bouquets, either. I came out the minute I gathered you might be in the market for this kind of a job."

Egan hesitated.

"Was that the only reason that brought you?"

"Yes. After what Martha told me."

"I see." Egan looked down. "Of course, if you insist on my thinking it over, I'll say I'll think, but —"

"Oh, I know if you answered now you'd say 'No.'"

"Do you?"

"Certainly. That's why I want you to think. We've got a meeting this afternoon and one Saturday. I'd kind of like to have you make up your mind by Sat-

urday. That gives you four days. And —" He unexpectedly put his hand on Egan's knee. "Be reasonable."

"The answer'll be 'No,' Mr. Henderson." Egan spoke very quietly.

"Now *don't* —"

"I'll get word to you again by the end of the week, but —"

"Egan, it's the chance of a lifetime. You can't lose, no matter what happens."

"It doesn't please me to have a woman brought into —"

"Egan, I tell you, she just told me what you'd been doing. She didn't send me out here."

"Is that true?"

"Absolutely. I asked her where I could find you."

"And it's because you think I'll work loyally and faithfully for you, and help put money in your pockets, and —"

Henderson's shoulders expressed his opinion.

"It's a job, just the same as any other job."

Slander was on the tip of Egan's tongue, but he held it back. Martha had sent Henderson here; and Egan's gratitude to her gained immunity for the parent.

"The answer'll be 'No,' but I appreciate —"

"Nothing's final yet. You've got four days. We want all the local men we can get. It's good business to have local men in it, Egan. There's nothing fishy about it. I wanted you to know as quick as you could I hadn't intended to cramp your style. I wish I'd known before. I wish you'd have come to me. You wouldn't have found me a bad man to do business with,

no matter what you'd been brought up to think. Your old man and I had plenty of scrimmages, but that don't prevent us from getting together. I could've helped you. I can help you right now. You think it over." He signalled to the chauffeur.

Egan clambered out to the road. His curiosity was highly aroused; he couldn't comprehend what motives were really behind Henderson's apparent magnanimity. He thought to himself that the man was either a powerful actor or a powerful hypocrite, with not much latitude for choice.

"All right," he said. "I'll get word to you somehow by Saturday morning."

And having scarcely ten minutes left for lunch, made his farewell with very scanty ceremony.

He had heard, of course, that Martha was in Plainfield. He wanted to see her, and when he had weighed the matter, he decided that there was no disloyalty involved. The only thing about it was that Mary, on Sunday afternoon, had held Egan's hand with significant firmness, and begged him not to forget that they were friends. Mary had been very much upset, that Sunday. She seemed to need more cheering up than usual. She had made Egan feel that while he wasn't actually engaged to her, his obligation was doubly binding. And, for a fact, he had been greatly moved by her evident dependence upon him. She had aroused all his protective instincts. It was a shame that she was bound to a man like Macklin. Egan was inclined to think that chivalry compelled him to maintain his status toward her, if only as a bulkhead. She needed his

friendship so much — and she might need more. Besides, she had vaguely reminded him of his promise. Curious girl, Mary. She would be seriously offended if he called on Martha.

But he went eventually to the Plainfield House, and saw Martha in the gorgeous public drawing-room on the second floor. Publicity meant safety, anyway.

They were both acutely self-conscious as they shook hands.

"I thought I'd better come to see you," he said, contriving to get himself together. "Your father looked me up this morning. You knew he would, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"What I want to find out from you is what you said to him that made him come."

Martha flushed at his brusqueness. "What I said?"

"Oh, I know you must have said something. He admitted it. That's what makes it rather awkward now. I wouldn't do anything in the world to hurt your feelings, if —" His voice sank. "If there were any other way out of it."

Since he wasn't looking at her, she dared to look at him.

"Hurting my feelings, Mr. Egan? Whatever do you think would do that?"

"Wouldn't it hurt your feelings if, after all you've tried to do for me — and I'm more grateful than I could ever tell you — I found I couldn't — couldn't possibly . . . go with that company?"

She gave a little start of surprise. "Why, I thought that was all decided!"

"It is, practically. But —"

"But —" She was breathing a little excitedly. . . . "Why, Mr. Egan, don't you know what happened this afternoon?"

"No."

She leaned forward, very intently. "Sure?"

"Positive."

She sat back. "Tell me how you think it's decided."

"I came to go over it with you, so you'd understand. I've turned it down."

"*When?*"

"This morning."

"To Dad?"

"Certainly."

She was confused; so confused that her tone was of protest.

"But he can't have understood it that way!"

"I think it was as clear as anybody could make it, Miss Henderson."

Her eyes were very wide. "That's awfully funny. . . . Why did you turn it down? Because your father didn't like Dad?"

"Why —"

"We've always been perfectly frank with each other, up to now, haven't we? I've known you didn't like Dad. I told him I felt it — and he explained how he'd always had to fight your old firm, and how there got to be hard feelings — but that shouldn't have made you keep it up, necessarily. And after he found out from me this morning what you'd been planning to do, and how Air Traffic must have crushed you, he was so sorry.

. . . *I* didn't suggest his getting you; he thought of it himself. He said you were exactly the man. . . . And this afternoon, they had a directors' meeting. He telephoned me just before dinner. He'd told the other directors he wanted you and — and — some of them, not all of them, but some of them were against it. Oh, *awfully* set against it. Mr. Luke wanted his son there, and didn't want you. And they had a long, long squabble and . . ."

"I told him I couldn't accept," said Egan blankly.

"And he told the directors they'd have you or they wouldn't have him!"

"No!" said Egan.

"But he did! That's exactly what he told them. He said they hadn't been fair to you. He said you're the only man he could put his hands on who knew exactly what was needed, and had all the qualities they wanted. And he said if they wouldn't let him have his own way and he resigned, he'd publish a statement in the newspapers and tell exactly why. And they wanted to take a vote, and he wouldn't let them. They wanted to leave it to Mr. Luke, the president, and Dad wouldn't let them. He just *sat* on it until everybody crumbled." She brushed her eyes. "So that's why I can't understand —"

Egan cleared his throat. "You say — Mr. Henderson — did all that?"

"Yes, he did. And just because he's sure you're the man he wants. He said he'd only seen you twice in his life, but he *knew*. And then you talk about not . . . liking him!"

"I didn't say I didn't like him," said Egan under his breath.

"Maybe you didn't say so in so many words, but I've always known it. And it's true, isn't it?"

"I —"

"*Isn't* it true?"

"I'm — afraid it is."

"And you don't know him any better than he does you!"

"Yes — I think I do."

"Well — how?"

Egan was rattled. "I just feel that I do."

"And so you don't want to work for Air Traffic simply because you don't like him, and he's a director? I don't see why you were willing to work on the trolley line, then. It's the same thing. He's a director of *that*. You aren't going to give up the position you've got now, are you? Don't you see how silly that would be?"

Egan, conceding reluctantly that it might be rather silly, said that he hated to feel that he was offered preference out of pity.

"Pity!" she echoed, with gentle asperity. "The only way I pity you is because you're so stubborn you'll miss half the good things in life without your ever knowing it! The idea! Take an absolutely ridiculous dislike to a man, without the first little thing to justify it, and then cut off your own nose to . . . you're such a big old *stupid*, Bronson Egan!"

Egan started, and looked away.

"Would it please you so much if I took that job?"

"Why, *I* don't care," she said. "*I* don't care

whether you do or not. It doesn't affect me one way or the other. But it's such a good chance for you. It's exactly the right thing — just as though it were made for you."

"Well, wasn't it?"

"Wasn't it what, Mr. Egan?"

"Made for me."

"No! I've told you over and over again. And if you let silly prejudices stand in your way all the time, you won't ever amount to anything, after all. I'm not going to *beg* you to take this place. I'm sorry you feel as you do about Dad. If you've made a decision you won't change, why, that ends it. Only it seems to me that what Dad did for you this afternoon ought to make you see. He told me that if I'd explained to him before what you'd hoped to do by yourself, he'd have had you in Air Traffic sooner. Please be sensible."

Egan tried to think what was sensible. There was the money end of it. There was the association. There was a potential future. There was — Henderson. And there was also, indirectly, Martha.

It occurred to him suddenly that every one of the Air Traffic directors had been intimately concerned with his progress. Some of them had been connected with the Egan Company; some were owners of newspapers.

Egan fell to stroking his chin. What might he not learn by association?

"Would it please you — if I changed my mind, and accepted?" he asked, soberly.

"Yes, it would, Mr. Egan."

"Then I'll change it," he said; and the instant the

words were spoken, he almost wished them unsaid. Not for any of the reasons which had previously influenced him; but for another, and a curiously illuminating reason. He had to confess to himself that it was Martha's personality which had swayed him. Would he have done it for Mary? Had he in fact yielded to Mary when her father had offered him a place?

"I'm glad . . . as glad as I was when I heard you're . . . keeping your promise to me — now."

Abstractedly, he said good-bye to Martha. He hoped fervently that she would be well and happy. Unsatisfied, he went slowly over to the Metropolitan Club. On the way, he confessed to himself that he wouldn't under any circumstances have done it for Mary.

XXII

IN the lobby of the club, Stanley Adams, no longer privileged to pass unchallenged into the inner rooms, was sitting patiently.

"Hello, Bronson! I knew you'd show up here sooner or later."

"So? What's up?"

"I'm not sure. Let's get off in a corner where we can talk. Let's go in the grill. I want some coffee."

Egan, after an instant's scrutiny, put his hand on the reporter's arm. "Good. I'll have some with you."

Adams shivered. "If you'd just preach *or* swear, Bronson —"

"What's the use?"

"There you have it! 'What's the use?' Well, maybe there *is* a use once in awhile. Maybe this is the while."

They went down to the deserted grill, where Egan commandeered a table, and put his elbows on it.

"You act like a man with something on his mind, Uncle Stanley."

The journalist's eyes were very bright. "I've been having more fun than a barrel of monkeys. The best part of the newspaper game is playing sleuth-hound. Everybody's got a certain amount of that in him, and I've got a lot. It's a great business. Trying to pry into other folks' affairs, and spade up all their buried

skeletons. Fine business — fine business! I've done lots of it. I've been nosing around for your benefit. I've struck something for us, Bronson — I sure have struck something. I was going to wait 'til I'd finished the job myself, but it's time for you to come in. Music cue."

"Who've you seen?"

"Garrity," said the reporter. "Big Bill Garrity. We've got as thick as thieves, only, as Harry Lauder says, perhaps I'm a trifle the thicker-r-r of the two."

"Garrity? Our old superintendent?"

"Garrity. Big Bill. A gentleman of infinite capacity." Adams laughed. "The original square-head, Bronson. His neck keeps right on going as far as his cowlick."

"What on earth have you been doing with Garrity?"

Adams drank half of his coffee at a gulp. "My own hunch has always been that Garrity's the universal joint of that busted company of yours. Garrity ran the plant all alone for nearly three months. First, when your dad was sick, and then afterwards — Garrity was in charge when everything happened. Garrity was in charge during the strike. If there was any mystery committed around there, Garrity's carrying it under his hat, and it's lonesome. And Garrity's a thirsty soul with one ambition. He wants to have twenty-five thousand dollars in the bank, a big red automobile, and a stucco house with a glassed-in veranda on it by the time he's sixty. He's fifty-six now. He says he saved up ten thousand once, but he lost it on a speculation. Garrity'll talk to the high bidder — that's my guess."

"Well, who's bidding?"

"Wait!" Adams finished his coffee. "I went down to Garrity a few days ago to get his views on shop management. Went to his house, and acted like Dicky Davis come to interview the Czar. Little article for the Sunday *Herald* — how the foreman can make or break the boss by the way he handles his men. Garrity shied off like a scared elephant. So I led the conversation around to pleasant things. Garrity thinks the Republicans brought on the war, put up the taxes, and outlawed the booze. I let him convert me, but he had to fight for it. His chief argument is that anybody who doesn't agree with him *must* be a damned fool. When I got converted, he decided to come down handsome. I let him bring out some of the worst imitation of fusel oil I ever had to sample. You could use it for a shampoo. He had the grace to make faces when he drank it himself. The medicinal twitch. But it's ag'in the law, so he loved it. I told him about a little private cache not too far from here. The next night we didn't make faces."

"Well?"

Adams smiled with self-approval.

"He's told me how a shop foreman can make or break the boss, Bronson. Oh, he hasn't admitted anything! Far from it. These were generalities. But he lacks imagination. I've got a hunch that all his generalities are out of his own experience. So, we can hunt up some of the men who worked under Garrity and find out how the labour trouble in the Egan plant happened. If it happened in about the same general way as Bill described, why —"

Egan was thoughtful.

"Hold on. Was Garrity quite responsible for what he said?"

"Up to a certain point," said Adams, grinning. "If you mean was he coherent — yes, he was. He called me 'brother.' Then he called me 'old pal.' Then he called me 'gossoon' or 'trombone' or one of those old-fashioned Hibernian pet names. I think he loves me." Adams turned serious. "No, Bronson, we're on the trail. Garrity was certainly talking out of his own experience. Whether it was an echo of last fall, or not, remains to be seen. Anyway, I've gone as far as I can; it's your turn next."

"Why did you think I ought to mix into it personally?"

"It's this way — Garrity's temperament doesn't show until he's had a few drinks. Sober, he's about as soft and pliable as a brick. But when he isn't sober, he sort of slops over. You can make him cry as easy as anything. Thinks he's abused, you know. The hand of every man's ag'in him, and he wants to be petted. Now the way to get information out of Garrity —"

"Is the way you went after it?"

Adams straightened. "Don't the ends justify the means?"

"Well — go on with your idea."

Adams hesitated, and finally went on.

"Well, if you could get at him when he's mellow, I think you'd get something out of him. I don't know what his reactions come from, Bronson, but he's bitter as the devil against the Old Man, and he's full of soft

soap about you. I didn't dare to touch on it but just a little. He thinks the Old Man ought to have given him more authority and a bit of stock. He doesn't think he ever had a chance there. He talked about the Old Man's heel on his neck. And he spoke about you as though you'd had the toughest kind of luck. As though you hadn't a chance, either. I believe that if you can hit him at the right time —"

Egan shook his head slowly. "I don't think I could quite do that, Uncle Stanley."

The journalist looked hard at him.

"I've paved the way, Bronson — if you're interested. I took it for granted you —"

"I *am* interested."

"But not to that extent?" Adams' smile was forced.

"I'm afraid not, Uncle Stanley." Egan hated to say it. "I appreciate everything you're trying to do for me, of course, but — even if your idea is the only one that'll work, I can't do it. I just can't. I'm sorry."

Adams half-whistled and drummed on the table.

"I don't believe you make very many allowances for people, Bronson. In fact, I don't believe you make any allowances for *any*body. You're too darned self-satisfied. . . . Ever drink anything yourself?"

"Oh, yes. I'm not a prohibitionist."

"Ever get soused?"

"Once. Everybody's entitled to find out what his limit is."

"You're hitting at me, Bronson?"

"I'm not hitting at anybody."

"But you think I'm a fine old specimen of a reprobate?" As Egan hesitated, he went on: "Go ahead — don't be afraid to say it."

"What difference does it make what I think?"

"It makes a lot — to me."

"I wish I thought so, Uncle Stanley."

Adams continued to drum on the table. "Once I was going across Broadway," he said presently, "and a bum stopped me and asked for half a dollar. I asked him why in thunder *I* should give him a half a dollar. He said: 'Us gentlemen ought to stick together.' So I asked him how he knew I was a gentleman. 'Oh,' he said, 'I can tell it by your fur coat.'"

Egan laughed inquiringly. "That isn't all, is it?"

"That's the end. Period."

"I don't get the point."

"Maybe you judge too much by appearances."

Egan laughed again, but not too mirthfully.

"I — well, it's a difficult thing to argue about."

"I don't think you know," said Adams, quite simply, "that when I was in New York I wasn't any howling success — did you?"

"I thought you were."

"Then why'd you suppose I came back here?"

"Why —"

"Prohibition's a great thing for the people who don't need it. But I've got to have some sort of eraser. Just get pickled enough to forget what a fool I was to get pickled once too often. . . . You don't need to look at me that way; I haven't committed any crimes. . . . Only . . . there are too many things I don't like to remember. So it's really killing two

birds with one stone when I have these sessions with Garrity."

"Even at that, Uncle Stanley —"

"You won't even close your fingers on the bird in the hand?"

"Not that way. I couldn't."

"Well —" Adams stared at him, shrugged his shoulders, and suddenly pushed his chair back. "Then let's go home."

In the old living-room — now the communal "parlour" — of the Vine Street house, two men arose simultaneously as Adams and Egan went past the door.

"That you, Adams?" Eddie Macklin, followed by Mr. Kent, came out into the hall. "The landlady said you'd be in shortly, so we waited. Can we have ten minutes or so — privately?"

Adams stared.

"I guess so. Come up in my room. Good night, Bronson."

"Good night, everybody." Egan was perfectly satisfied to make his escape.

Adams escorted his visitors up the dim-lit stairway, set out chairs for them, offered cigarettes. "What brought you around?"

Mr. Kent leaned toward him in a suave preliminary. "Adams, you're a sensible man."

"Thank you, Mr. Kent, thank you. That makes it unanimous."

Mr. Kent frowned at the levity. "You know that Eddie, here, is likely to be the next mayor of Plainfield?"

"I've heard it mentioned once or twice."

Kent threw a note of aggression into his voice. "If he's nominated, he'll be elected."

"That's true enough. Yes, I'll subscribe to that myself."

"And he'll be nominated, too."

"It may be so."

Mr. Kent was profoundly impressive. "Anybody who plays with fire is liable to get his fingers burned, isn't he?"

Adams had grown very sober. His eyes were still brilliant.

"It sounds reasonable."

Kent dropped his voice a semitone.

"What we want to know is,— speaking as man to man — are you going to oppose Eddie's nomination?"

Adams laughed aloud. "How can a poor newspaper man —"

"Your job on the *Herald* isn't half good enough for you. Suppose you got your job on the *Times* back, with a decent salary. Would you write and sign an editorial article of the proper tenor?"

"Proper? Is anything in politics proper?"

"Yes; in favour of Eddie's candidacy."

"That's an important question."

"Well, how'll you answer it?"

Adams hesitated. "In the first place, I wouldn't go back to the *Times*. They haven't got money enough to hire me for ten minutes. In the second place, I wouldn't write political dope if I did go back. In the third place, I wouldn't promise to back any candidate."

Kent stiffened. "But I think you'll do all three."

"Do you?"

"Something tells me so, Adams."

"One of those little birds you read about?"

"Exactly."

"I'd like to know what it said."

Kent glanced at Macklin who had been sitting very erect, listening carefully. "When I was in New York in 1917, that little bird flew over the river to me from Hoboken —"

"Ah!" The journalist winced.

"Am I right?"

"So far." Adams was visibly shaken.

"Shall I go on?"

"Not necessary." Adams bit his lip, and Macklin grinned at him.

"I thought not. Now you have in your possession a drawing, or a photograph, or several of them, that might inject a bit of destructive . . . er . . . humour into this campaign. Correct? Suppose you destroy it. Suppose you and I both bury a certain portion of . . . er . . . the past. Suppose you go back to the *Times* — I'll arrange so that it'll be smooth enough sailing for you, and —"

Adams' backbone was rigid.

"And support Eddie? In a signed article?"

"Precisely."

"And the alternative —"

"That'll be what you make it."

Adams, who was sitting next the door, suddenly reached out and opened it.

"Oh, Bronson!" he called. "Bronson! Come in here."

Macklin snatched at his arm.

"Adams! You fool! Shut that door! Keep that fellow out of here!"

Egan appeared, pajama clad, on the threshold. "Want me, Uncle Stanley?"

"You bet! Sit down, Kent. You too, Macklin. Hold 'em, Bronson!"

The two visitors, barred by Egan's hundred and eighty pounds of energy, halted. Kent was apoplectic. "Adams, if you . . . this is the most damnable —"

"Hold 'em, Bronson. Don't let 'em get out just yet. I just want you to hear —"

"Shut up! Shut up, or by God! I'll make you —"

"They want me to go back on the *Times* and support Eddie, or —"

"Adams, I've warned you!"

"Or they'll tell what I almost told you — at the club an hour ago." Kent relaxed. Macklin's mouth dropped in a feeble smile. Adams, his mouth working, went on relentlessly.

"That two years ago, after a newspaper party in Hoboken, when nobody was quite sober, I — I got married. On a bet, they said afterward. I don't really know."

Kent looked over at Egan. "To a chorus-girl, Bronson. Aren't you proud of your friend? Well — that settles it. Tit for tat. Go on and print your story. We'll print ours. Come on, Eddie."

"Not quite yet." Egan had put his back to the door. "What do you gentlemen think you're going to do now?"

"That's our affair; not yours."

Egan's brain was working backward, and finding items of value. Today's talk with Henderson had fixed two incidents in his mind.

"Oh, but since this is a family party . . . Eddie, why haven't you ever been to see me since that last night we spent together at Mr. Kent's house? Isn't that something that ought to be aired, too?"

The room was vibrant with silence. Adams had gone over and sat down limply on the bed, his head in his hands. Macklin was stone.

"Bronson," said Mr. Kent with difficulty, "you and I are too old friends to stand here bickering like this. If these other two want to fight, let's you and I drop out of it. I've simply beaten Adams at his own game. He tried to blackmail Eddie, and I —"

Egan nodded at Macklin. "Told Mr. Kent about Charlie Feinberg, yet?"

The prospective mayor gulped. "Y-yes, Bronson. That's all right."

Mr. Kent looked from one to the other. "Maybe it is — and maybe it isn't. Eddie says . . . go ahead, Bronson."

"Shall I, Eddie?"

Macklin, driven to desperation, shook his head in a jerk of hysteria. Kent, staring at him, smiled crookedly. "By God!" he said, "I believe you lied to me about that, too!"

"No, Mr. Kent — no, I didn't —"

"We'll see. Bronson —"

Adams lifted his head from his hands. "Chase 'em out, Bronson. My head aches. I can't go this any longer. Chase 'em out, will you?"

Egan stepped aside from the door. "As long as it's Adams's room, gentlemen —"

Kent had snatched up his hat. "Can I see you a minute?"

"Not tonight, I'm afraid."

"Tomorrow morning?"

"I'll be out at Sanford."

"Tomorrow night? No, Monday night? If I telephone and confirm it?"

"Yes."

"My house?"

"That'll do."

"Come along, Eddie. . . ."

After a long pause, Egan went over and put his hand on the journalist's shoulder.

. . . "I heard you givin' 'em hell, Bronson. Good boy. . . . Oh, what a hog-pen of a world! They tried to club me, did they? . . . Look in the top drawer of my bureau. . . . See? . . . Tried to club me to kill that, and let Eddie. . . . Newspaper work's an awful strain, Bronson. . . . You use up so much energy you take to stimulants to keep going. You get to drinking. *I* did. . . . Not any to hurt. Just enough to put the brilliancy into you. . . . Two o'clock in the morning brilliancy — you can't get it any other way. But once I went too far; I had a row with the city editor and I got fired. I guess that was bad for me. It made me sort of belligerent. I said to myself I didn't need to take any back talk from anybody — and I didn't. That made trouble. I could get a job easy enough, but I sort of kept getting fired. Same old thing —

I'd get tired, and then I'd get an edge, and then I'd have a row and get through. . . . The Old Man never knew that. I didn't write about it. I guess I was on every paper in New York. Bye and bye I hit bottom. Worst sheet in New York — simply rotten. I used to feel ashamed to have to read my own stuff in it. The way I salved myself was to say that my stuff was *my* stuff, and the character of the paper couldn't hurt it. It was awful yellow, Bronson. . . . Once they wanted a sensational inside story about the hop joints — opium, you know. So I thought I'd do a de Quincey on the side. Make it realistic. De Quincey at the corner of Mott and Pell streets. . . . Don't be scared; I haven't got the habit. . . . But I was in a public ward for about a month. Sort of poisoned. When I got out I was all shaky. I had about ten dollars left and no job. There wasn't a place for me anywhere in New York. Had to get a couple of drinks to put me on my feet.

"I met some acquaintances in a saloon, and they sent for some of theirs, and we had a party. . . . I got married that night. I heard afterwards it was a dare, but one man says it was a bet. . . . It was in Jersey. After it was all over, I tried to figure it out — what to do. I was crazier than when I'd gone to Bellevue. She liked the idea of being married — it was so sort of respectable. She's playing in high-class burlesque. She won't get a divorce, and I can't. I couldn't get any more jobs in New York, so I came home. . . . She's never taken any money from me — won't take any. You see, she might be worse. Not much — but some. She's let me alone pretty well. . . . I've never

seen her since. But I've got that on my mind, Bronson. On my mind. . . . Well, the cat's out of the bag now. I knew it would come sometime. They tried to club me with it. Kent did. Now you know. . . . What're you going to do about it? "

Egan's face was putty. He put out his hand again to the journalist's shoulder.

" Why — help — if I can," he said, under his breath.

XXIII

THE day opened gloriously, flooding the world with strong December sunshine and a flippant little breeze from westward. Even the sombre precincts of the old Egan mansion responded to it, once the morning had rushed through the lofty windows, and taken the citadel by storm. It was a day of whipping curtains, when the long, white draperies floated inward and danced in mid-air; refusing to be quelled except by strictures on the ventilation. To be sure, Mr. Wilson complained that he had been kept awake all night by the constant rustling, and Mr. Pennypacker lectured from the almanac on the behaviour of air currents, but breakfast was more cheerful, nevertheless. Judge Perkins was too sprightly to reflect upon the immortality of the soul, and Adams, after a week of profound despondency, was alert again. Even Mrs. McCain managed to relax a degree or two of her oval tension, and Millicent wore the expression of a lady in mourning who has worn mourning almost too long.

Judge Perkins and Egan walked down town together.

"Bronson," said the Honourable George suddenly, "how much have you thought about this circus performance of Eddie Macklin's? At our house, I mean. Stanley's campaign bomb."

"A good deal," said Egan.

"How'd it affect you?"

"Why — the way it naturally would, I suppose."

"If it has," said Perkins, "you're barking up the wrong tree. I'd just quit."

Egan regarded him without comment.

"Once I reminded you," said the old lawyer, "that when you once get to hating a man, you hate him all over. Of course you do. Everybody does. That's why a jail-bird finds it so hard to get another chance. Nobody'll hire an ex-bank-robber for a shipping clerk for fear he might steal some of the stencil-ink. And so on. When as a matter of fact — you see what I'm driving at about Eddie?"

"I think so." Egan was non-committal.

"Right this minute," said the Judge, "Eddie's safer behind his reputation than you'd be if you'd turned the same trick he did. An established reputation's an awful hard thing to beat, even in politics. And campaigns are so rough, everything's discounted, anyway. You used to be something of a lady's man, and Eddie's supposed to be an ascetic. Excuse my making it personal. But Stanley's got it in his mind to make a big hoorah-boys about it, sometime before election, and I don't want you to get the idea into your head that there's anything in it. There isn't. It won't beat Eddie. Either politically or — personally, as regards you and me. What does it signify?"

"It signifies that Eddie's a bit of a cad, anyhow."

"It don't even signify that! I tell you, if we made a law — say, that no man could ever hold public office that had ever kissed another girl after he was engaged or while his wife was alive — lordy! Wouldn't politics be simple! You'd have to advertise to get congressmen. Nonsense. One of the damnedest, cussedest things in this whole rotten life of ours is what decent people like to suspect about people that's just as decent

as they are. And more! Who in the world *hasn't* made a mistake? And that's about all Eddie did. There wasn't any moral obliquity in it, I'll bet. And you get a sight farther along if you just look for natural things. You feel a lot cleaner-minded yourself. I know."

Egan was silent for half a block.

"Stanley had an idea that he could use that as a lever, and maybe make Eddie tell a few things. I wasn't very strong for it, myself. But —"

"He's passed it on to the right people already, and they're holding it in reserve. But that's neither here nor there. What are we after, boy? I don't give a continental cuss what Eddie's morals are. They don't concern me, or you, either."

"Yes, they do."

"Well, then that's your business. But what Stanley and I are after mainly is to find out whether anybody deliberately steered The Egan Company onto the rocks. If they did, then we're going to be in a position to collect something. If they didn't, we aren't. The only morals of the other fellow that concern me are the morals he followed in this particular business. Now we're all working together, instead of everybody thinking he's the only one that's trying to protect you, we're out on the trail of a big discovery, and Stanley goes and gets sidetracked on nothing. Let him *be* Mayor. That won't save him."

Egan nodded. "I'm half inclined to believe you on that. But it doesn't make me like Eddie any better."

"Oh, damn!" said the lawyer pathetically. "What's *that* got to do with it? Well, good luck to

you. Be sure to come to lunch at one. I'll have seen the receiver then, and got the latest news for you."

Intrinsically, it was a beautiful Monday, but it would have seemed no less beautiful to Egan if it had been raining cats and dogs. As he continued his way down-town, he was scarcely aware of the multitude of joyous fancies mushrooming in his brain. He was fairly tingling with energy; his grip on life was almost a physical grip. His eagerness was partly mental and partly muscular; he was as excited as when he had first set out for flying school — when he felt like running the last hundred yards to headquarters, not because he would gain anything material by running, but because the compulsion of his joy went to his feet. And now that he had turned his case against Macklin over to the Judge and Adams, he had released just so much energy to be happy with.

In the elevator, it was all that he could do to repress his impatience. His blood was warm with animation. His mouth was set in a wide smile which almost ached. And yet, for the first time since his return to Plainfield, his self-apprehension amounted to pure modesty. The opening of the door at the proper landing sent a pinching throb to his heart.

He emerged into a reverberating chaos of activity. Here and there, partitions of new wood were already in place, many of them rising independently like illustrations in the plane geometry. New office furniture stood about at random, piles of it. The floor was littered with fragrant sawdust and shavings; and the depth was slowly increasing as a score of carpenters, blocking

the passages with saw-horses, trimmed yet more partitions, and in the process, made the human voice inconsequential. Little groups of men stood talking and watching; Egan recognized some of them. They seemed also to be uplifted by the stimulus of construction; childishly impetuous to get the work done, and yet childishly happy to stand idle and watch it being done by others.

"Mr. Egan?" One of the watchers had detached himself and come forward. "Glad to see you. I'm Mr. Hoyt. Sorry I was out when you called Friday. Well, what do you think of it?"

"Great," said Egan, as he shook hands with the Treasurer.

"They're getting along bit by bit — we ought to be pretty well settled by Wednesday. Some of the offices are ready now. I think yours is. Want to have a look at it? . . . Let's meet some of the other men first, though." He beckoned to the group he had just left. "Oh, King! and everybody else! Come over here a second. I want you to meet Mr. Egan. He's the son of his father. He's going to run the flying end for us."

Egan shook hands with three affable young men who seemed fully as excited as he was, himself. He shook hands, less pleasurably, with Henry Luke. The fifth man, a grey-haired personage with his hat on the back of his head, needed no introduction. He was Richards, one of the former directors of The Egan Company. Egan had known him slightly for twenty years, but Richards, for all he acknowledged at the moment, might have been an utter stranger.

"Well, young man," he said, raising his voice to carry over the bang and droning of the carpenters, "how many brand-new ideas did you bring with you?"

Egan looked at him, and saw that he wasn't smiling.

"Brand-new ideas?" he echoed.

Richards motioned briskly.

"Ideas. That's what you're here for. Don't forget it. You're very young for your job. Ideas are all that count. Hope you make good." He nodded stiffly, and turned away. Egan discovered that Henry Luke was grinning at him.

"Come look at your office," said Mr. Hoyt, taking his arm. "Don't mind Richards," he added, in a lower voice. "That's his way. He likes to shake young men up a bit, and watch how they react. He thinks it's medicinal, I guess."

Egan, picking his way through heaps of wainscoting material, was amused. "That's all right."

Hoyt steered him through a labyrinth of partitions to an open space. "Here you are. Right next to me. It isn't awfully big, but it'll do for awhile, don't you think?"

To Egan, it was palatial. It was a room perhaps ten feet by fifteen, on the side of the building, looking out over lower structures to the west. There was light in plenty. Two or three shining flat-topped oak desks were in the middle of the room, with smaller, stenographic desks piled atop. A big table in one corner was burdened with vertical files, chairs, waste baskets, and a dozen or more of wire correspondence trays.

"You'll have an office down at the field, too, but that'll be just for occasions. Not much more than

desk-room. This is where you'll be regularly. Name on the door, and everything."

Egan turned to the ground-glass door which had been swung inward against the wall. It bore, in letters hardly dry, the gold-leafed inscription:

DIRECTOR OF FLYING OPERATIONS
LIEUTENANT BRONSON EGAN

Pleased, but uncertain, he turned back to Hoyt.

"I'm out of the service now, you know."

Hoyt bobbed his head.

"Yes, but it's an asset. We're going to use all those military titles for a while, anyway. It's common enough in a complimentary sense. Has been ever since the Civil War. It won't hurt you any. Now you see there's a connecting door into my room. You and I and Richards are sort of supposed to be a sort of central committee —"

"Control Board?"

"That's it. You ought to be a big help to us in organization. This thing ought to be worked on more or less military lines. . . . Well, we three are supposed to work pretty much together. Flying, Finance, and Administration. If I were you, the first thing I'd do would be to get up an organization chart of your own department, to show just what you think you're going to need, and then I'd get up one for the whole works. That's the sort of stuff Richards likes. Something concrete. You want to stand in with Richards."

"How about my personnel?"

"Hire it yourself. We figured you could do with

two stenos, and a clerk to start. I'll give you the salary limits. Get 'em where you can. And I've got about a thousand pilots' applications to look over as soon's you're ready."

"I'm not expected to hire the pilots, am I?" He was oppressed by the responsibility.

"You hire the pilots, but the Maintenance Department hires the mechanics and so on."

"Then my job, as I see it —"

Hoyt waved his hand. "Your job is to get the ships from one place to another on time. Maintenance furnishes the ships in proper condition. Traffic loads and unloads 'em. Supply gives you fuel. Maintenance gives you landing fields. You get the ships there and back. How you're going to do it, I don't know. Personally, I don't know the difference between an aileron and a triplane. That's what you're here for." Hoyt sat down on the edge of one of the desks. "You'll get all your instructions in plenty of time. There won't be any actual business until spring, of course. But as long as I've got you here . . . Richards doesn't think the express and passenger business is all there is to it by a long shot. He has all sorts of ideas. He thinks there are countless sidelines we can make a profit on. Maybe he's right. I'd advise you to think over the possibilities. Get up a list of everything you can scare up for the Company to do. Maybe we'll do some consulting work as aëronautical engineers. We can give lessons in flying. We can act as agents for sport and commercial planes. As a matter of fact, we've got state agencies for six or seven of them already. We can write insurance; our charter covers that, too. We

can sell accessories. We can get up sight-seeing trips, and rent ships for long-distance parties. We can have exhibitions. We can get up advertising stunts. We can write aërial insurance. There's dozens of things that might fit in. Well — you're the doctor on the flying end of it. Go to it, and let's see what you think up."

His brief outline had pushed Egan's perspective almost out of sight. "You're going to try to do all these things at once?"

Hoyt shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? The men who've put money into this concern aren't pikers. They've all got other businesses. They can afford to lose every nickel they've put into this. It isn't a question of playing safe; they'd rather run it so as to have the company either flat broke or paying fifty per cent. right off the reel. Of course, it's an experiment. . . . I doubt if this air business follows the old line of least resistance. You take the bicycle business. I guess you're too young to remember that, though — well, it started slowly, and then overnight there were five hundred companies competing all at once. There was a hot competition, and all but two or three of the biggest ones went broke. The automobile business got going the same way, and it's finishing the same way. Now the airplane business is different. Publicity's come into it. The people who manufactured battle planes have had so much free advertising during the war that people who start manufacturing *now* may never catch up. I'm no expert, by a long shot, but you talk about the Liberty Engine, or the Hispano-Suiza, and I've heard enough to know they're good. You talk Hand-

ley-Page, or Caproni, or De Haviland to me, and it's the same thing. Well, the public's familiar with these names, and it'll take an awful long time to forget. And I believe that the first transportation companies to cash in on all that publicity, by specializing in ships and engines that everybody knows won the war, 'll have the inside track right from the start, provided they go out in a big, broad way. This isn't any question of building up a future the way the pony express developed into the Wells-Fargo business; we're starting off big, and if there's any merit in the idea, we ought to win out. So we're going to jump in all over, and capitalize the publicity — and squeeze every cent out of it while the going's good."

Egan drew a long breath.

"There's plenty to do, then, all right."

"Plenty for everybody, especially you. . . . Here's your office, and you can fix it up to suit yourself. Get some stenographers tomorrow. Wade in. Look over the applications from pilots, and get 'em in some sort of order. Start on your charts. Of course you'll have to keep in touch with the other departments, and you'll want to swing around the circle of the seven cities once or twice in the next month or so to keep your eye on the different fields, and get the hang of it — By the way, I'd run out to the one here this afternoon, if I were you. It hasn't got a name yet — none of 'em have. That's something we'll all have to think about. We'll have a young fleet of automobiles to run us back and forth in. Just introduce yourself to the men on the field, and you can have whatever you want. There's an ex-Lieutenant in charge: his name's Utley — the

man that flew here in Fair Week. He's a nice boy. He'll be your right-hand man out there. Now let's look through the other offices. . . . We've had to rent another floor already, and maybe we'll need three. Watch out for nails. . . ."

From the instant that he stepped from the little touring car to the level of the old farm now in process of transformation to a flying field, Egan was completely, irresponsibly happy. The cares and the problems of his other life slipped away from him. The very air tasted differently. It was a commercial flying field, but a flying field nevertheless. He felt almost the same numb, terrified, jealous pleasure as when his *moniteur* had first pointed to the clipped-wing Penguin in which he was to take his first flying instruction. He was desperately apprehensive of his own ability, but he wouldn't have missed for all the world the opportunity to test it.

The raw bones of several hangars were already glistening white in the sunshine, and the skeleton work of other buildings — shops, warehouses, administrative offices — was under way. The old farmhouse was being remodelled for storage purposes. Beneath a temporary housing of canvas stood an old training plane, and Egan's heart jumped as he saw it.

"That's our pathfinder," said a pleasant voice beside him. Egan met the friendly grin of a sun-burned young man in flannel shirt, whipcord breeches and puttees. The young man was very debonair, with a Gallic-looking black moustache, but he had an efficient manner and Egan liked him spontaneously. "You're Lieuten-

ant Egan, aren't you? I'm Utley — in charge of the field. Almost said 'O.I.C.'"

They shook hands firmly.

"Where were you?" asked Egan.

"Me? Oh, I never got over. I was one of the eighteen million officers who were under orders when the armistice was signed. I was in the Canadians — volunteered up there, and got a transfer back here. Stunt instructor in Texas most of the time."

Egan nodded, and sidled towards the old plane, his fingers itching.

"I never drove one of those things. . . ."

Utley laughed. "Well, I never drove much of anything else. I began on it. They put us through in Canada on the sink or swim system. I had ninety minutes dual before they gave me a ship and told me to take her up." He laughed again. "Got off the ground somehow — Heaven knows how; *I* don't. They told me to circle the field three times at 2,000 feet and come down. I circled it three times and couldn't remember how to *get* down. Bye-and-bye I got my nerve and pushed over the stick."

"With power?" Egan was humorously interested.

"You bet! She dived, and I was standing on the rudder. Zowie! I was scared to death. So I hauled the stick back and the next thing I knew I was circling the field at 3,000. Went around some more and tried it again. Same result. Dived — and came to at 4,000. Once more, and I was circling at 5,500. It was getting along towards dusk. I *had* to get down. But I couldn't remember what to do. Bye-and-bye I thought of the gun. So I tried it out, and got into a

glide, and took the banks all right, and I was down to about 1,500 when right under me I saw another Hun crash. Woof! Gave her the gun — and up to 3,000 again." He laughed gleefully. "When I *did* land, I cut right in front of the line, and never hit a thing. Almost pitch dark, too. That's the way they taught us in the early days. . . . Want to take her up for a little jazz?"

"I ought not to," said Egan, regretfully.

"Oh, come on! . . . She's all right. Of course, after your experience —"

Egan swallowed hard. "That's not it. Got some spare goggles? I really ought not to, but —"

"I've got everything. It's warm as toast up to 3,000, and these old buses are slower than tar, anyway. Lend you a winter flying suit if you want it. Come on!"

Egan looked at the sky. His heart was thumping heavily against his ribs, and to his own astonishment, his breathing was rapid.

"I came out to look over the field. I —"

"Well, you've seen all you can see from here. Come upstairs and get a new slant at it. We'll go out a few miles and I'll show you where we plan to put our guide marks. Big white arrows with an A at one end and a T at the other. Made out of granolithic. Come on."

Egan climbed up to peer into the "office"— the forward cockpit. The plane compared with his old machine as a buggy compares with a racing car, but the principle was there, just the same, and the possibility.

"For . . . for just twenty minutes," he said, hesitantly. "I really ought not to, but —"

"You're on. You stay here. I've got a spare outfit in the shack. I'll take her up, and then you can show *me* something."

Something came up into Egan's throat, and choked him.

"Contact!" said Utley, in the rear cockpit.

"Contact!" echoed Egan.

He released the propeller and leaped aside. The heavy mahogany blades gave a curious lethargic start, like the involuntary movement of a fat man, and slid into easy revolution, with the engine purring softly. Egan, transfigured, kicked away the blocks from the wheels, and climbed to his seat. The propeller-wash flooded him as he snapped his belt; and he loved it. The engine was turning over a bare six hundred revolutions per minute, but firing perfectly on all cylinders. Utley warmed the motor thoroughly, and throttled down for a second.

"All right?"

"Let her go!"

The engine sprang into deafening life, flattening the high, dead meadow grass for a hundred feet to the rear, and sending skyward a cloud of brown dirt in its wake. The car moved forward, not with the gradually acquired momentum of a geared automobile, but in a sudden burst of motion. The wheels bumped and rumbled as on flat tires. Then the tail lifted; Utley had gathered flying speed. One gentle surge upwards, and Egan was looking down at a recessive world. His joy was as impersonally sensual as though he had inhaled a lungful of pure ether. Every muscle was taut

with it. He wanted to shout aloud in pure abandon.

The pungent, exotic odour of burned castor oil enthralled him. He thrust his head beyond the windshield for the mere ecstasy of feeling once more the lash of air waves, incomprehensibly severe except to those who know it. Of course, this little ship . . . still, he was flying!

The needle of the altimetre pointed to the figure 2,000, and Egan was dumbfounded until he remembered that he was used to calculating in metres instead of feet. He gazed out, fascinated, at the brown-green chessboard of the earth. Bands of silver marked the location of water-courses he had never known to exist. Behind him, Plainfield was a toy village lurking under a veil of grey. The horizon had fled immeasurably distant.

The roar of the engine diminished to a throaty purr, and the ship rocked lazily in the swell of the air. Egan, grinning, turned. Utley, grinning back, raised his hands high above his head, the signal to "take her." Egan's stomach went out of him as he took the stick, and put his feet out to the rudder.

He bethought himself of a page from Captain James Norman Hall's "High Adventure." It was about the enchantment of just such moments. "A world planned and laid out by the best of Santa Clauses for the eternal delight of all good children. And for untold generations only the birds have had the privilege of seeing and enjoying it from the wing. Small wonder that they sing. . . ."

Egan felt like a bird. He wanted to feel still more like a bird. Delaying only until he had the "feel" of

the unusually clumsy ship — clumsy because he was accustomed to the best on earth — he gently pushed the stick forward to gather excess speed, eased it back, and as the nose of the little car began to lift in response, pulled the stick well in to his stomach. His brain was almost asleep with content. A sentence from his school instructions rolled into his brain. "As the ground is again seen, throttle motor, and ease gently out of resultant nose dive." Egan had looped the loop.

He had relentlessly limited himself to twenty minutes, and he filled them with acrobatics which soothed his soul. He turned wing over wing, and fluttered towards earth like a wounded swallow. He made the *retournement*, and looped again. He climbed high, and lost by successive Immelmanns the altitude he had so recently gained. He sent the ship to rotating on its own axis, while in level flight, in the drunken gyration of the barrel-roll. He dived, and spun, and rose again, in open defiance of what were held for centuries to be the inviolable laws of nature. At last, wearied only by his own reactions to the sheer pleasure of it, he slipped earthwards, glided into the field from a broad S, and landed as surely as though he himself had worn the fabric wings, and managed them as accurately as his arms. He taxied around a circle, and brought the machine to rest in front of its canvas hangar. The engine stopped, with a final puff of coal-black smoke from the exhaust. Egan pushed back his goggles, and unstrapped his belt.

"Say!" said Utley. "I thought I was going to show you those guide marks of ours!"

Egan laughed in staccato.

"I'll have to come out again tomorrow to see those," he said.

By previous agreement, he went over to the Plainfield House that day to lunch with the Honourable George Perkins and Stanley Adams. Both of them had news for him, news which couldn't wait until dinner time.

"I've seen Garrity again," said Adams. "Remember I said he told me he'd lost ten thousand dollars on a speculation? Well, I took a chance on putting it up to him, and I was right. *He* bought Egan stock, too — through Eddie. And he told me two other people he knew who'd done the same thing. Pennypacker was one of 'em. He used to be too afraid of Eddie to talk about it, but he's got a new angle; he says Eddie's going to be licked and he wants to tie himself up to the winner!"

"We're getting to the point, Bronson," said the Judge. "It's beginning to be clear that Eddie persuaded six or eight comparatively poor people, Mrs. McCain and Garrity and others, to chip in to buy that stock from the Citizens Trust, so that he or his principals wouldn't appear in the transaction, and got these people all to give their proxies, which he voted at the annual meeting a year ago October. He reelected the old directorate, putting himself on it in place of the Old Man, and the old directorate made Garrity president, and gave him free rein. Then the company went on the rocks. I'm getting surer and surer it was done deliberately. All the evidence is that way —"

"Garrity says he took his orders from Eddie," chimed in Adams.

"Exactly. And who did Eddie take his orders from? That is, if he took 'em from anybody? Who would possibly be interested in having the Egan Company crash? Only two — George Kent and Martin Henderson."

"Sh-h!" said Adams suddenly. They were seated in the main dining-room, and the daughter of George Kent and the daughter of Martin Henderson had just appropriated a none too distant table. Every one bowed.

"More likely to be Henderson," said the Honourable George guardedly. "Old Man Egan always said he —"

"Kent's tried to play horse with me," said Adams; "but that was a political defence. I hardly think he'd go so far as to try sabotage. And Henderson — well, I'll have to admit I'm getting sort of sold on him, too. Personally, I don't believe it was either one of 'em. It was Eddie all alone."

Egan, tasting his entrée, told himself that it certainly looked dark for Henderson. He wondered if Henderson's showy kindness to him had been mere alibi. The Kents had at least played in the open. All he had against them was Mary's fickleness, and the colonel's attack on Adams — pure politics. But Henderson had got him this chance to fly again; and it harried him to think of giving it up. He hoped to find that Eddie had worked alone. And yet there was Eddie's individual loss of twenty-five thousand dollars.

"I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out plain bad

management," he said. "I can't see where we've got grounds for suspecting anybody else just yet. I've met him on the street twice since the other night and he's dodged me both times."

Adams and the Judge exchanged glances.

"The one bright thing about it," said the Judge, "is that the receiver says the company's coming out fine. Henderson bought the patents for a big price. It looks as though sooner or later there'll be perhaps a couple of hundred thousand for the stockholders."

"Really?"

Egan was visited by a delightful thrill. Nothing gives a young man quite the sense of mental intoxication that the unexpected acquisition of money does. And he had rather stopped thinking about The Egan Company; he had certainly stopped thinking about it as a source of future revenue. In the hurly-burly of his present business affairs, and the complexity of his personal matters, he had lost much of his interest in the past. The old tragedy had become weakened in its power to move him, financially or sentimentally. At the Honourable George's announcement he was as much startled, and exhilarated, as though a long-forgotten speculation had burst into glorious bloom like Bethlehem Steel in 1915. A couple of hundred thousand dollars? Why, two-fifths of it would be *his!*

"So he says. And that means that the McCains and Garrity and the other lambs'll get back as much as they lost, and you'll have — oh, sixty or seventy thousand, anyway. But not for a year or more, Bronson."

Egan was thrilled beyond regret that the salvage was too late for him to fulfil his independent visionings.

"That's wonderful!" he said. "That's wonderful."

"And that gives you a chance to be a real philanthropist, if you want to. Of course, you don't have to — but the failure was what stopped that Milly girl's education. And Lord knows she needs some more. And bearing in mind what Eddie's proposition was — if you want to offer to loan Mrs. McCain enough to send Milly to a good school to finish with, why, I'll advance you the money temporarily. It just seems sort of appropriate, somehow. It'll only be a loan. She'll pay it back when she gets her money, and I'll carry you in the meantime. I thought you might like to have it in your name."

"Yes," said Egan soberly. "I'd like to."

"One more talk with Garrity," said Adams, "and if I give him *that* information — maybe we'll have the answer out of him. And whether it's Kent or whether it's Henderson, it nails Eddie."

"Are you going to publish what we all know about Eddie?"

"The day after he's nominated," said Adams grimly. "And that'll kill his mayoralty, whether we get the goods on him the other way or not."

"Even if — they retaliate?"

Adams coloured.

"Oh, what difference does it make to me? Ever since you knew it, I feel as though everything's all right."

"Oh, by the way, Uncle Stanley! Is there anything in sight for you yet?"

"A real job? No. Got one for me?"

"Yes, I have. Assistant."

Adams's eyes brightened, and then dulled. "Do you think that crowd would stand for it?"

Egan borrowed some of Henderson's vocabulary. "When I'm put in charge of a department, I'll take on anybody I like, and get an O. K. afterward. Besides, it's a great chance to pick up ideas. Didn't you notice that every one of the old Egan directors, and Henderson, and both the *Herald* and *Times* men are on this board? What did you think I went into it for, if it wasn't that?"

Adams laughed, and nodded toward the nearby table.

"I'll take your job, anyway," he said, "provided you don't mind a teetotaller. . . . What? Why, *sure;* I've cut out the booze! Now that you two fellows can talk over my rotten old secret with me, and cheer me up, and boost me along, I don't seem to need any other stimulants . . . and the doctor said I was getting liver trouble, anyhow."

Egan put his elbows on the table.

"I won't forget," he said, "that you were willing back there, to leave the *Times* and come in with me on my scheme — if I'd ever started it — when you knew —" He included the Judge in his gesture — "when both of you knew it wouldn't go. . . . It took me a long time to realize what that amounted to. I never thought it was anything but plain business. But when I woke up, and saw daylight. . . . Well, if you were willing to stick to me on a wild gamble just because I'm I, then I'm going to break my neck for you people, just because you're you."

"I couldn't let you go it alone, Bronson . . . could I?"

"The point isn't whether you could or not . . . you wouldn't. Won't you come in and help me now, Uncle Stanley?"

The Judge motioned to Adams. "Do it," he said.

On his way out, Egan stopped at the table where Martha, as it appeared, was entertaining Mary Kent in a farewell ceremony. "Yes," said Martha, not looking at him as directly as she usually did, "we're going back to Dayton tonight. Father's staying over for one more meeting. Won't you sit down?"

Egan declined, with profuse apologies. To sit between these two girls was rather too much of an ordeal. "Did you find a house?"

"Yes, rather a nice one. We're to move in the first of February."

"It'll be splendid to have her over here, won't it, Bronson?"

"Oh . . . splendid," he agreed.

He couldn't decide whether it was more difficult to be at ease with the daughter of Kent, or the daughter of Henderson. Innocent as children, both of them, but the father of one or the other had probably — "I beg your pardon?"

Martha was smiling at him, a little wistfully. "I said, if you happen to come to Dayton, you must be sure to look us up." Sitting, so to speak, directly under the guns, it was the most cordial invitation she could venture.

Egan glanced at Mary; Mary was outwardly very tolerant.

"I'll scratch your eyes out, Martie," she said hu-

morously. "Didn't you know I'm his chaperon? I am, too; aren't I, Bronson?"

Underneath the humour, however, there was a tone which chilled Egan.

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of my getting over; but if I ever should —"

"Don't forget us, please." As though he could! For a single hour of a single day!

"Good-bye, then, Miss Henderson."

His clasp was meant to be as formal as the time and place demanded, but presently he awoke to discover that Martha was growing roseate.

"For goodness' sake, Bronson," said Mary Kent, "don't you know you shouldn't hold hands in public? I'm amazed at you! Right in front of your chaperon, too!"

There had been an instant when his heart had glowed with new warmth, but the chill which Mary gave it endured surprisingly.

XXIV

AT the office, Hoyt was fuming in wait for him. "Oh, there you are!" he said. "I was just going to send out a searching party! I thought you'd mislaid yourself for good. Directors' meeting at the hotel at half past three, and they want you."

"Me? What for?"

"Third degree, I guess. They want you to outline your whole idea."

"My whole idea? *My* —"

"Just so. Put up a workable project."

Egan was alarmed. "Why, Mr. Hoyt, they've got the cart before the horse!"

"I know it." The treasurer hesitated. "Oh, thunder! There's no sense in letting you go it blind. We'll settle down to an even keel in time, I suppose, but just now there's a big wrangle over policies. Policies and politics. You're a Henderson man, and —"

"I am, am I?"

Hoyt stared. "Well, aren't you? I'll grant it would have looked more logical if you were Kent's, but —"

"Where in the devil does Kent fit into this?"

Hoyt's stare was prolonged. "Fit? My lord! He's one of the chief stockholders. He isn't a director, himself, but he's got a majority on the board, or close to it. He's playing inside stuff. As a matter of fact,

I guess I'm the only independent there is. Richards and Luke are the principal henchmen for Kent — they're the ones that'll bother you."

Egan grimaced. "So I'm going under fire because I'm a Henderson man, am I?"

"That's about the size of it. They'll do their damnedest to pick flaws in every idea you've got. That is, the Kent crowd will. It's not so much to discredit you — it's to show Henderson that he's got to let Luke and Richards pick their own men."

"Well —"

Hoyt reflected, and decided to hold back part of his information, and to disguise the rest.

"It's nothing to me, one way or the other. I just didn't want you to get caught unawares. But I'm sort of sympathetic with Henderson on this, because it seems to me he's got the best judgment. I think it'll help the Company, and sort of square up things, and let Henderson keep the whip-hand if you make a good showing. If you don't, something's likely to blow. That's all."

"But what — am I supposed — to say?"

"They'll ask you questions," said Hoyt. "Don't let 'em horse you. That's all. Remember there isn't a man jack who knows the air part of it. They're all executives. It's a wonderful chance to say exactly what you think. I'd go *to* it." He felt that it was inadvisable to tell Egan that the directors' meeting really didn't care two straws for Egan's opinions, but was convening more as a caucus to see which leader the big interests would support. It was a matter of Henderson against the field.

When Hoyt and Egan entered the banquet-room on the top floor of the Plainfield House, going up on tiptoe as they crossed the threshold, the directors' meeting was already in full swing. The question under lively debate was so much a matter of finance, and so little within Egan's comprehension, that he had ample time, before any attention was shifted to himself, to take a mental photograph of the various personalities he had to deal with. At the first glance, it was obvious that friction had developed early; but wonder as he would, Egan couldn't separate the two factions. He simply couldn't tell them apart; because he should naturally have imagined that all the local dignitaries would support Kent.

As he listened, restively, he also wondered why Kent had chosen to remain in the background. Kent wasn't a director, and he wasn't present, but his influence was there as definitely as though Kent were sitting at the table. Egan felt it even although, from moment to moment, he couldn't determine accurately who were the Kent spokesmen. The atmosphere was there. And Kent had sponsored this company — Kent, who had been Egan's first friend to pronounce air transportation an impracticability. It was an indigestible and a mystifying discovery. He couldn't understand what motives could have impelled Kent to such doings in darkness. It was as though Egan, standing apparently on firm ground, had slipped, and found no support.

The argument died out in a final sputter of protest, and a hasty vote, and Henderson, who hadn't previ-

ously taken the slightest notice of Egan, suddenly looked up and beckoned to him. Egan, circling the big table, was increasingly conscious of an unexpected attitude on the part of Henderson, an utterly passionless attitude not directed towards Egan alone, but towards the group in general. The stout man was neither jovial nor cynical; he was strictly business to the finger tips.

"Here's Mr. Egan," he said, and added, parenthetically, "Sit down, Mr. Egan." He surveyed the Board coolly. "Any questions you have to ask Mr. Egan —" He gestured his unconcern, and, averting himself, began to pare the end from a long cigar. Egan, the target of a dozen pairs of eyes, was wrapped in uncertainty. He was, *prima facie*, a Henderson man; Henderson had got him his place, and Hoyt had said that he was a Henderson man; and yet —

For a moment or two, the room was silent. Eyes had left off staring at Egan, pencils were tracing aimless designs on blocks of paper. King and Garverick were exchanging views in mumbled undertones. The room was very still. Egan was unwillingly assuming the status of a defendant.

"Well?" said Henderson. He had pared the cigar to his liking, and lit it slowly, as though he enjoyed the mechanics of the act. His tone was slightly acid.

Luke, the president of the company, a man with a worried manner and the steadiest sort of grey eyes, took a printed slip from his pocket-book, and adjusted his glasses. Without even looking at Egan, he began, with a school teacher's querulous inflection:

"If you were in absolute power over the affairs of

this company, Mr. Egan, and had unlimited funds — what type of airplanes would you buy? Knowing what we purpose to do, and what we've already contracted for — what type would you buy? And how many? And why?"

Egan looked at Hoyt, and got no satisfaction. He looked at Henderson, who was in rapt contemplation of an irregular ash. He got no information there. He swept the table for a clue. The faces of the directors, without exception, were placidly vacant of assistance. Some of the men were intent, some were elaborately indifferent, one or two were smiling. Egan cleared his throat. The room was very quiet.

It struck him forcibly that this little knot of men, seemingly so callous to their power, controlled not only the million dollar Air Traffic Company, but also, in their various other capacities, two-thirds of the industrial machinery of Plainfield. In mass, they represented probably twenty million dollars' worth of property and good-will: and they were silent, waiting for what he had to say. He had time, even then, for a fleeting estimate of what would have happened to him if he had tried to establish his own little company in this same field. Seldom had he felt so young, so insignificant. To think of this directorate as against his own trio — Adams, Perkins and himself!

"I wouldn't buy any more airplanes," he said. His own voice was very low.

The president methodically folded his slip of paper and put it in his pocket. He removed his glasses, and snapped them prisoner in a gold case. Egan, without turning his head, felt that Henderson had turned his

slowly, and was studying Egan between puffs of his cigar. Hoyt had suddenly taken to tapping the arm of his chair with one forefinger, and Garverick was making faint curious sounds with his lips. Otherwise, the quiet was still undisturbed.

"What *would* you buy?" Mr. Luke seemed hiding behind his eyelashes.

"Small diribles," said Egan.

There was a little rustle and stir among the Board. Men glanced at each other. One laughed outright. Richards leaned forward and rested his elbows on the table. "And yet you planned to start a company of your own with airplanes, didn't you?"

Egan's eyes held the level until Richards looked away.

"My views haven't changed, Mr. Richards. I've only answered the question."

"Explain yourself," said Luke, shortly. "It's rather late in the day — but go ahead. Let's hear what you've got to say. Give us your reasons." He, too, brought out a cigar, and clipped it, with nervous haste.

"The airplane is made for high speed for short distances, Mr. Luke. The dirigible is a weight carrier. And we're more interested in freight than passengers. That's the main reason."

"And takes all night to go fifty miles?"

"Seventy-five miles an hour, Mr. Luke."

Egan had an impression that Henderson was either very much amused, or very much annoyed, but he didn't attempt to verify the intuition by visual evidence. He was absorbed by the sight of Boyd, owner of the *Times*,

and King, owner of the *Herald*, sworn enemies for a generation, whispering to each other in the greatest good-humour. They had all the symptoms of men who were partners in an excellent joke. Johansen, a mild-eyed dreamer who emerged from dreams just long enough to be a remarkable chemist, was gazing at the ceiling; his expression was that of a man who is being comfortably shaved. Hoyt was drawing pictures on his tablet of paper, and admiring them with his head on one side.

The president took to jiggling his watch-charm.

"Did you ever fly one?"

"No, sir."

"Ever travel in one?"

"No, sir." Egan began to appreciate the weakness of his position.

"Ever seen one?"

"Yes, a good many."

"Where do you get your facts about speed?"

"From the British Air Ministry, and Glenn Curtiss. Curtiss designed the N C seaplanes that made the trans-atlantic flight." Egan observed that the president was uneasy about something.

Garverick had straightened up. "If they're so good as all that,— as good as you're trying to say they are — why didn't *we* use 'em? Why didn't the Government use 'em in the war? That's what I want to know."

"The Navy did use them. This country was slow in getting into production."

Johansen, blond, repressed, and with his 'round-the-corner manner, cast in an observation: "I always understood that Germany's program of dirigibles failed."

Egan's assent was vigorous. He was gaining confidence.

"That was in combat. It failed because England had a good defence. That doesn't affect their value commercially. Nobody's going to shoot at freighters in peace-time. And England wouldn't have had a chance to spoil that program unless Germany'd been able to get their dirigibles to England pretty regularly. Isn't that logical? In other words, the program failed not because Germany couldn't get the dirigibles where they wanted to, but because England could destroy 'em after they got there. You've heard only one side of it, at that. Perhaps you didn't know that England actually owned more dirigibles than Germany does. And they wouldn't have gone into that game unless they knew what there was in it, would they?"

The president moved slightly. "What other reasons have you? Any?"

Egan was quite at his ease. His technical superiority was encouraging.

"Well, for one thing — speed in an airplane means safety. You have to maintain pretty high speed to stay in the air at all. When you lose speed, you're likely to have difficulties. In a dirigible, it doesn't make so much difference. Hardly any. A dirigible doesn't always have to come down if it has engine trouble. You can sometimes repair the engine in the air, if you want to. That's a tremendous advantage, both in time, and in safety. So you can travel over rough country where it wouldn't be safe to fly an airplane. That's because the question of landing places isn't im-

portant. Or, rather, it's important but it isn't imperative, because you don't just have to land as soon as something goes wrong. It's safer for passengers, and a lot more comfortable. Then in an airplane you've got to be careful to fly level, and in a fog it's dangerous; a dirigible stays level all the time, and you can just keep going. You can stand up and walk around in a rigid dirigible. You can —"

"Doesn't the gas — or rather, isn't it inflammable?" Richards had asked the question, and Johansen was smiling.

"Yes, but it's safer than an airplane at that. England lost only one dirigible in two and a half million miles of flying, that way."

"If you use helium gas, it isn't inflammable," said Johansen. "Not inflammable — just expensive."

"To fly seventy-five miles an hour, how much weight could they carry?"

"Oh, thirty or thirty-five tons."

The Board, to a man, sat up. Questions shot at Egan from all sides. Hoyt, tapping the arm of his chair, wore a huge grin.

"Suppose you had to leave one outdoors in bad weather?"

"They used to do it regularly. Month after month. They don't —"

"In a high wind?"

"You moor them to big masts. It's —"

"Not use hangars?"

"Only for long repairs. Save time."

"How high do they have to fly?"

"That's another point. An airplane, to be safe,

has got to fly around 3,000 feet at the lowest, so as to have room to start the engine with a nose dive if it ever cuts out, or to recover from loss of control, or to pick landing fields and have room to land in. A dirigible is pretty safe anywhere — even a hundred feet, except in a storm like —"

"How about quick landings for fuel — or to load or unload?"

Egan laughed. "They could carry almost fuel enough to go 'round the world. And for stops — why, use grapnel. That's the usual way. Anchor."

"And at night? How do they steer?"

"Think of the Zeppelins, Mr. Luke. You can navigate by the stars or by compass. Night flying's just as easy as day flying."

"What's the cost?" This was an explosive demand from Garverick.

"I don't know; but I *do* know that two small dirigibles flying around our loop, even if they cost three or four hundred thousand dollars apiece, would show more profit than ten or twenty or fifty airplanes. You can slash your rates all to nothing, too. And even if you did take twice as much time as an airplane would, you'll cut the railroad's time in less than half, for passenger traffic — and save, say between here and Chicago, one day on express, and a week on freight." He ventured now to glance towards Henderson. The Chairman's face was ironed smooth of any expression, but in his eyes there was a precious light. Egan looked at Hoyt. Hoyt was intent on vacancy, as though vacancy delighted him. The Board rustled.

"Can you tell us, Mr. Egan, why — if this is your

honest belief — you planned a company of your own with —"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Egan buoyantly. "Airplanes are cheaper. You can get quicker deliveries. They're a tiny bit more spectacular, because the public over here isn't fed up on them yet. I never considered them myself because I knew I couldn't finance one."

"But your professional opinion is that —"

"Is that you ought at least —"

Henderson interrupted him lazily. "Don't say 'you'— say 'we.'"

Egan nodded, and took the amendment.

"We ought at least to look at the subject and see what's in it. It needs experimental work, and a lot of it, but that's what we're here for, isn't it?" He smiled at the president, trying to make the smile infectious. "Of course, there are some disadvantages. Landing in a high wind, for instance. And motor trouble that can't be fixed in a hurry, and lets the ship drift. But if you had a multimotored airship, with reserve engines ready. . . . You see, if any one had asked me . . . I was trying to raise a hundred thousand dollars because I didn't think I could possibly raise more than that, anyway. And that meant starting with planes — not dirigibles. There was another point, too . . . I could fly myself, and keep expenses down."

A little flare of laughter burnt itself out.

Henderson crossed his legs comfortably. "I hope you gentlemen are slowly beginning to understand why I hired this boy. If you'd ever taken the trouble, any of you —" He got more emphasis by stopping here than if he had finished the sentence.

Johansen, fiddling with his heavy blond moustache, said a word for progress. "Mr. Egan may be right. He may be wrong. Certainly the reason why the United States is so far behind in these matters is because we're not intensive students. But *we're* here to plan for the future."

"Of course," said Hoyt, "there's nothing to prevent our going ahead with the airplane contracts, and getting some sort of service under way as soon as possible, and then —"

"Investigate?"

"Certainly. Do the pioneering, if necessary. Have all kinds of service. Airplanes for fast, daily service, and dirigibles for heavier stuff, less often. Express and freight. Just carry out the original idea *plus*."

Directors began to talk to each other in undertones. Egan, isolated, caught snatches of dialogue.

"My God, man, on a tonnage basis! Suppose he's right, why —"

"Say even thirty tons. Against our estimate of a ton and a half!"

"The cost's what bothers *me*."

"We certainly ought to have looked into it, anyhow."

"You could carry freight for a quarter cent per pound per mile. A hundred pounds to Chicago — a hundred times a quarter cent times four hundred —"

"That's about eight dollars. Delivered — with stops — in a day."

"Call it a hundred and fifty a ton. Forty-five hundred —"

"Forty-five hundred for one *trip!*"

"Different equipment — everything."

"You can't control the wind, though?"

"If you only went out filled to a third capacity —"

"Why should *we* experiment? Let the Government do it."

"Well, what do the damned things cost?"

"I know, but *some*body's got to do the experimenting. I'm strong for it."

"I suppose we'd need two — one on schedule, and one reserve —"

"It means gas plants. I'm afraid of it."

"But the load! Think of the bulk business! It's a monopoly!"

"Well — if it could be made to work, it's the *answer!*"

Henderson rapped on the table. "Gentlemen — please. Some one make a motion to appoint a committee to report on this at the next meeting?" The conversation settled down to a desultory whispering.

Richards addressed the Chair without looking at it. "Move the Chair appoint a committee of three — three directors — to investigate and report next meeting."

"Second the motion."

"Moved and seconded — any objection? None? Quite so." Henderson sat up. "Committee will be appointed presently. Next business, election of two directors. . . . That's all, Mr. Egan, thank you. . . . According to constitution, the stockholders having failed to elect a full Board, the directors are authorized to fill the vacancies. Directors must be stockholders. Any nominations? . . . That's all, Mr. Egan. Thank

you very much." Egan rose, and went out to the little ante-room, where he had left his hat. He didn't know whether he had succeeded or failed, but he had a good intuition that he had done more than Hoyt had expected of him.

"I nominate G. W. Kent."

"Second!"

"Second!"

"Here! Henderson! Mr. Egan. . . . Shh! He's getting his hat. He's —"

"I nominate Edward W. Macklin."

"Second!"

"Shut up! Wait 'til Egan's out of here!"

Egan closed the door with a bang, but the voices of the Board pursued him through the thin partitions.

Hoyt's voice. "I nominate Bronson Egan."

"I object to that!"

"Not a stockholder!"

"Second the nomination."

"Second . . . second!"

Egan, waiting for the elevator, was stunned.

"I tell you he's not a stockholder! You —"

Henderson's voice, very clear. "The Secretary will inform the Board whether or not Mr. Egan is a stockholder in this company — and if so, when he acquired his stock."

Boyd's voice, drawling — "Bronson Egan — one share — certificate Number 46A — transferred by Martin Henderson. December twentieth."

December twentieth was today. The elevator boy wondered why Egan stumbled.

The final edition of the *Herald* announced that G. Willoughby Kent and Bronson Egan had been elected to the Board of Directors of the Air Traffic Company, and that Richards, Hoyt and Egan were a committee to investigate and report upon the feasibility of dirigibles. To Kent, it meant a great deal. To Egan, it brought complete bewilderment and the fresh realization that he should have to work early and late to justify his position and his salary. To Macklin, the defeated candidate, it meant everything. And this regardless of whether the Company made a huge success or a colossal failure. That was immaterial.

In the morning, Hoyt paused for an instant at Egan's desk.

"You may not know it," he said in an undertone, "but you broke up the whole show yesterday. . . . It took 'em right off their feet. It was good work, too. Know who you beat for the director's job?"

"I have an idea," said Egan, cautiously.

Hoyt bent lower. "It's an omen. The faction that controls the Board is going to control Plainfield. It's practically a primary. It's the only meeting where there's complete representation of all sides. Keep it under your hat. I think it was a straw vote on Macklin."

In the meantime, having had no telephone message from Kent, Egan let him alone.

XXV

ON Christmas morning, Egan went for a long walk over the hills with Little Johnny Jones, and, for the first time in months, enjoyed a thoroughly informal conversation.

"Your friend Eddie," observed Jones at one juncture, "seems to be losing a little ground, doesn't he?"

"I thought he was *your* friend," retorted Egan.

Jones had smiled feebly. "So did I. But he's been making too many mistakes lately to suit me."

"You're not just a fair-weather friend, Johnny, I know. If you had been, you wouldn't have been willing to go in with me on that fool insurance scheme I tried to crowd down your throat."

Jones had considered the point judgmatically.

"No-o, I don't think so. I'd have played with you on that because you sure did need somebody to lean on. And after it busted, I could have got my old job back. But I've got my limits. I guess other people have, too. I hear Eddie's been having rows with his own crowd. There's even some talk that he won't be nominated. It's a sure thing he's got a fight on his hands, anyway."

Egan lifted his eyebrows. "Who's back of him, anyway? I mean, in politics. Just Kent?"

Jones looked astonished.

"Oh, the whole manufacturing crowd — Kent and Luke and Richards, and that outfit. They got him his job as city counsel. He was supposed to be a sort of

representative of all the big Plainfield business. Eddie was quite a boy for a couple of years. But I understand he doesn't like to stay put. He seems to think he's got so strong he can win out without any backers at all. At least, they say he's beginning to buck Kent."

"Hm." Egan was thinking of the ghastly humorous weapon in Adams' hands.

"If you want to know it, there's a lot of talk about your going in with that crowd again, too," said Jones.

"What kind of talk?"

"Oh, nothing much — only it helps along the impression that Ed's on his last legs, and Kent's losing some of his grip, too. Everybody knows how you two get along together. Nobody'd put you in the same room and expect anything but a scrap. So it was one or the other. The talk was that if Eddie lost the nomination, or if he got it and then got licked, he was going to be the attorney for Air Traffic. It'll be the biggest account in Plainfield — the whole legal side of the thing's so new. A mighty fat job. And it was going to be a semi-political plum for Kent. But when Henderson took you on, some of these wise old birds said he was sort of putting it straight up to Kent. It was to feel him out. If he'd been strong enough with his crowd and the independents combined to get you out, it would have shown that his crowd is still backing him. They say that the fact you're in there as a Henderson man shows that the old crowd hasn't the old pep. Because they had to choose between you and Eddie."

Egan snorted. "All this bunk about using me for a kind of a tennis ball to see which way the wind blows —"

"Well, I'm not trying to explain anything — I'm only repeating what I heard. Where are you having dinner — with the Kents?"

"Me?" said Egan, surprisedly. "Why, no. I'm having it at the house. I've got too much work to do this afternoon to go out anywhere."

For decades, the world of commerce has laughed at what it terms "Army red tape." Men who call themselves, and by others are also called, "business men," speak of Army procedure as the apotheosis of the slow molasses train of thought and action; and even those who have been a part of the Army often resent the cumbersome methods so characteristic of it — methods which, to a nervously-constituted critic, spontaneously suggest fanaticism.

It is of course true that the Army could learn many a valuable lesson from Business. It is, however, no less true that Business could learn twice as much from the Army. Egan, having only the one kind of experience to guide him, and finding himself in unquestioned command of his own department, put into effect certain systems, certain regulations, certain ways of doing things, which attracted prompt notice.

In the absence of any actual flying operations to direct, his present work, save for his duties on the committee to investigate the dirigible situation, was entirely in the realm of planning. He therefore began at the beginning, and established the four-basket system of correspondence. He introduced the custom of having his own named typed at the end of his letters, in order that even if his signature were misread, the reader would

be corrected instantly. With the very first letter he dictated, he ordered three carbons — one to forward with the letter itself, two to file.

Hoyt, who was more than ever interested in Egan since the youngest executive of the staff had played so perfectly into Henderson's hands, came to Egan with a grin. "More of your red tape, eh?" he said. "Of course, this is your office to run as you like, and my hat's off to you and Adams most of the time as it is, but why send a carbon with a letter? Think the fellow who gets it reads one sheet with each eye?"

Egan explained. "I'm having directions printed on my stationery, so everybody'll understand. Why, suppose a couple of months from now the man who gets this letter wants to write me about it. In business, he'd say 'Referring to your letter of October 5th,' and then go on, and I might be absolutely in the dark, and before I'd even know what he was driving at, I might have to dig through the files. Or he might refer to the wrong date, or no date at all. But I want him to come back, if he ever does, like this — 'Referring to your letter of October 5th, *copy attached*' — and I'll have the whole story right there. Just the same reason that I keep two carbons instead of one. If I ever want to take this up again myself with the other fellow, I'll begin, 'Referring to *our* letter of October 5th, copy attached,' and so on. Saves hunting through files, and overloading your memory, and guesswork, and all sorts of things."

"Hm!" said Hoyt. "You won't have room in here for your files alone."

"I don't intend to have any files here at all. It's

bad business. All correspondence ought to be in one place. I've spoken to Luke — he agrees with me. Nothing can get into the files without somebody's initials as authority for filing, and after that, nobody can get it out without an order slip. The chief file clerk charges whoever takes anything out, and follows it up in forty-eight hours to see that it gets back."

"Suppose somebody writes us a letter, and later on, we want to refer it to somebody else —"

"You don't. You send a copy. The rule is never to let anything with ink on it get out of the office."

Hoyt laughed indulgently "You'll get the place top-heavy with formality. Our job's to make money for the house."

Egan was perfectly serious. "I've told you already this is the only way I know how to do things. I wish you *would* criticize. . . . I'll show you some of my designs for card records — Here's an efficiency record, borrowed from the rating-card of the Committee on Classification of Personnel in the Army. It takes five minutes to rate a man, and if you do it with ordinary intelligence, it'll tell you things you never even suspected; . . . it'll show you who's falling back, and who ought to be promoted, and by gosh! it *works*. . . . Here's a card to show every pilot's performance, good or bad — what conditions he flew under, and everything. . . . Here's the trip card. Data of loading. Data of maintenance. Data of trip itself. So if the chief mechanic here O. K.'s a ship bound for Chicago, and it has to make a forced landing because of fouled plugs, the pilot isn't charged with the delay. It shows the fuel, and what grade, and who inspected it — the whole

works. If any single thing goes wrong, you know exactly where to pin the blame, and you know where to give praise, too. . . . Here's the ship card, to show exactly what it costs us to operate. . . . Here's the —"

"But a lot of that is nothing but duplicating records! Some of it's the Secretary's job. Some of it's Luke's. Some of it's mine."

"I don't care whether it's duplicating or not. I need it. That's the whole answer. The Treasurer may not keep his books so as to tell me whether one ship or another will pay better to start on a special trip to Cincinnati, under certain weather conditions, with a certain load, with four different pilots to choose from. I don't see why you should keep that stuff, and I —"

"So you'll multiply your clerical help —"

"No, I don't think so, and I won't spend ten cents more per person than you do for yours, and I won't have any system in here that doesn't pay for itself, directly or indirectly. What's bothering you is that you don't check up the indirect methods. There won't be any loafing in here, if I can help it. The big point is to hire just the right grade of intelligence. I need about twelve dollars a week's worth for this sort of thing. Say, sixty dollars a week for the records alone. I'll save a month of that on the first special trip we ever make, and a year of it after we've operated a month on schedule."

Hoyt threw up his hands.

"Go to it. Give it a fair trial. I'd like to see how it works. But — what's this? Going into the rubber-stamp business?"

"That's the Alibi Section," said Egan. "Time-

stamp on all incoming correspondence. Time-stamp on all outgoing. Combined stamp and dater for inter-office work. Suppose I want to send this letter over to you — it wasn't really intended for me, but for you. '*Referred to Mr. Hoyt — 10-5-19 — 11 A. M.*' You'd have hard work to prove it stayed on my desk too long."

"You might forget to send it to me."

"No — I wouldn't have to remember. I heave it in my 'OUT' basket. I've seen Luke about this, too. We have three or four messengers circulating from the mail desk. Boys. Every ten minutes by the clock one comes to my desk, leaves whatever he may have for me, gathers up everything to go out, and takes it — all of it — to the mailing desk. The mail clerk licks all the stamps — and gets the outgoing mail under way. This isn't outgoing *mail*. It's interoffice stuff. In not more than ten minutes, one of those boys is going to your desk the same way. That's what you do — heave things in the 'OUT' basket and go on about your work."

"More salaries for messengers!"

"And no taking your stenographer off her job, or running around yourself, or burying the thing and forgetting it a day or two. Messengers? Eight dollars a week."

"But if all this is workable," demanded Hoyt, "why did it ever take so infernally long to get correspondence answered in Washington? Why —"

"Sh-h-h!" said Egan. "For results, give me a fresh kid just out of school, and a blondined steno who chews gum, if they know they can be fired if they don't get the work out."

"Oh!"

Egan was suddenly aware that for several minutes he had been speaking, to an older and a more experienced man, in a tone of arbitrary confidence. He blushed, and recalled his own business record.

"Of course, you know a lot better than I do whether this is good stuff or not. If you say so, I'll cut it all out."

"We-e-l — we'll see how it pans out. Has Richards seen it?"

"Yes."

"What does he think?"

Their eyes met, and both men smiled faintly.

"Did you ever notice," asked Hoyt irrelevantly answering his own question, "that you can't strike sparks on mush?"

In the generality of his new surroundings Egan was so happy that he forgot to be specifically distraught about the past. The question of whether he had been wronged by this man or that ceased to concern him so acutely as to clog his thoughts. He was still clinging firmly to a resolution to discover, sometime, what had really happened a year ago, but he had succeeded in putting this matter in its proper place intellectually. It wasn't properly the subject of a direct crusade; it was a side-issue, important, but not to be exaggerated — not to be allowed to interfere with his progress. And since Adams and Judge Perkins had volunteered to conduct a quiet investigation for him, he was well content to stand aside, and let them do it.

Henderson, naturally enough, was a puzzle to him,

because Henderson was such an apparent contradiction in terms. But for that matter, who wasn't? Adams was. Kent was. Egan himself was. Life was too short, thought Egan, to permit of the analysis of every passing motive. It was all right for Arnold Bennett to do it, but that was Arnold Bennett's business, and he made a profit out of it.

He had abruptly learned that it was more fun to be a pioneer, with other pioneers to support him than to inherit a parental business, or to go it alone. It was fun to deal with improbabilities gradually becoming probable. It was fun to be back in an organization with de-centralized authority, and to make his own mistakes and profit by them. Old Man Egan had preached for years of the inherent virtues of one-man control. Perhaps that was why the Egan Company had disintegrated so rapidly without Old Man Egan's supervision.

Life was unfolding itself to him as merely a perpetual series of tolerations. You either tolerated, and kept fairly happy; or refused to tolerate, and lived through hell. Except for the amount of money involved, the occurrences of last autumn had no more permanent significance to him than the bickerings of a Dorcas Society. His brain was slowly arriving at the stage where all men's brains ought logically to arrive. He was learning to discard, without effort, everything non-essential to his happiness.

My friend Samuel Merwin (forgive this obtrusion of personality) has given us one of the very best similes

ever wrung from the English language. It refers to the storage battery in the modern automobile, which automatically cuts itself off from the generator when fully charged — and to the similar construction of some people's emotional natures.

Egan had one of these natures. His own problems had overcharged them, and automatically he cut them off.

He fell into the habit of calling rather often at the Kents', but at times when he knew the Colonel to be absent. It was a habit due partly to actual desire, and partly to an uncomfortable sense of reaction from Martha Henderson. On one of these occasions, Mary took him to task for his impersonality:

"Bronson," she said aggrievedly, "I don't believe you like me any more at all! I don't!"

"Why not?"

"Well, you — you don't act the same way."

Egan laughed a trifle constrainedly. "I made you a promise a long time ago, didn't I?"

"Well — yes. Only if you're coming to see me at all you might just as well show a little *interest*."

When he went home that night he found himself wondering whether he had been quite fair to Mary.

XXVI

THERE were two destinations toward which Egan, with equal loyalty to his employers, might have travelled on the first of February. It was merely necessary that some one from the Home Office hasten to both places in the earliest possible moment. Egan himself would go in one direction, and have Adams go in the other. The choice of objectives called for no delicate analysis of the company's needs; each man could handle the ground architecture of a field as well as the other. Dayton was perhaps one degree more important, for this particular purpose, than Cincinnati — perhaps one degree, perhaps not even that. But from the moment that Egan began to weigh his own responsibilities, he knew in his heart that his judgment was already made. He declined to give Cincinnati the benefit of even that single degree of doubt. He should send Adams to Cincinnati, and he himself should go to Dayton. He even planned to go on Sunday morning, in order to insure a fine, fresh start on Monday.

On the train, he convinced himself, as though it were a new and unforeseen subject, that there was really no reason why he shouldn't go to call on Martha Henderson. He mustn't, of course, allow such a pretty diversion to interfere with business. But there was plenty of time — plenty of it. He had carefully arranged for it in advance. One can't do very much business on Sunday afternoon. That was providential.

Fortunately, Martha was at home. She was "at home" in more than one sense, as Egan discovered to his disappointment. Somehow he had never imagined Martha as "popular." He had rather fancied that her best qualities wouldn't appeal to the masses. He had prided himself as an appreciative critic of the unostentatious. Now, while he waited by the hall-mirror for the maid to announce him, he was healthily piqued by the variety of masculine voices drifting in from the living-room. There were girls' voices, too, but these were inconsequential. A woman's place is in the home, anyway — even in Martha's home. But the men were out of harmony with Egan.

Martha herself came out to greet him. She seemed to have even more poise than he had remembered, and Egan seemed to have even less than he had counted on.

"Why, what a surprise." she cried, giving him both her hands. "I thought Father said you'd gone to Cincinnati!"

"I . . . er . . . changed my mind," said Egan. "Am I interrupting —"

"Nonsense! Do come in. . . . I always wanted you to meet my friends. And now that you're here, they're all together!" Her tone was cordial enough, and her pleasure at his arrival was apparent, but Egan's mood sank appreciably. He had no reason to resent the presence of other men, but he did. While he argued that he ought to be glad to be here at all, and while he recognized that he was glad, he was unhappy about it. Porcellian. The sight of at least eight young men in the living-room made him worse.

Her friends proved to be neither more nor less at-

tractive than Egan had expected; the girls didn't suffer by comparison with Plainfield girls, and the men, Egan thought, grudgingly, were really quite personable. They understood the elements of hospitality, too. They did their obvious best, for Martha's sake, to make him temporarily one of themselves; there was a good deal of camaraderie which was plainly created out of stock on hand. Egan was too sage to be flattered, even when the liveliest admiration of his business connection was professed. He knew that Dayton was the cradle of the airplane. He knew that he was no more a hero in this setting, and brought no more novelty to it, than if he had joined the staff of a new automobile company in Detroit. Why, some of the people in this very room might have taken their bicycles to the Wright brothers to have new tires put on, or the chain graphited. The sudden upset of his emotions led him almost to feel that he was unwelcome.

His grewsome thoughts of departure were checked by the unanticipated appearance of Martin Henderson, who came in jubilant. Egan, speculating upon the cause of his effervescence, was rather confused to find that it was nothing more important than the present gathering. He had never suspected Henderson of popularity, either. But whatever his reputation in Plainfield, Henderson seemed to attract plenty of honour in his own country. The barometer of the younger set is pretty accurate. Instantly upon his entrance Henderson had been surrounded. He was a great favourite.

"Why — well, if it isn't Mr. Egan!" he exclaimed heartily. "Welcome to our city! I thought you'd gone to Cincinnati! Martha asked me about you only

last night, and I told her you were going the other way! I do like your taste. Well! How'd you like *our* boys and girls?" He radiated his satisfaction in their general average. "Great, aren't they?"

To Egan, although he spoke in warmed-over superlatives, it was as though his host had drawn an insurmountable line of demarcation between them.

More and more keenly, as the afternoon wore into dusk, he felt his own intrusiveness. It put him over half a dozen different mental hurdles. He was regretful, irritated, resigned, envious, tortured and regretful again. Twice he determined to leave; twice he repented, without quitting his seat. It appeared that Sunday night supper, with every one supposed to lend a hand, was already getting under way. Egan, the only guest who wasn't perfectly at home, lingered behind the others until Henderson, genially dominating, swooped down upon him. Presently, without quite understanding how he had got there, Egan was in the kitchen, with a big checked apron over him, slicing cheese for rarebits, and making a very inefficient job of it. There were only three other people in the kitchen — two girls and a man. Martha, nodding towards the pair who were rummaging in all the closets, had just whispered to him: "They're engaged!" She leaned close to him to whisper, and her hair brushed his cheek.

Egan went on stolidly, although it was sheer luck that he didn't slice his fingers. It was his first experience, for many years, in this superficial sort of domesticity which has so many fatal endings. He thought that Martha had never appeared more adorable.

"Mary doesn't care much for this sort of thing," he said, all but unconsciously.

"Oh! Why, no, I don't believe she does."

After a pause. "You like it, don't you?"

"We've always done it Sunday nights," she said.

"No cook — or anything?"

"Mercy, no! What do we want a cook for? Isn't this more fun?"

Egan slashed viciously at a fresh slab.

"That's so."

"Let me take what you've got . . . I always make a cream gravy first; it keeps it from being stringy."

Egan absent-mindedly followed her to the range, his brain mechanically occupying itself with the salary of a cook. The engaged couple had slipped out, announcing to the world at large that they were bound to ransack the ice-box, and could do it unassisted.

"I'm awfully glad you made me take that job," he said. "For one thing, it's taught me how much I didn't know."

Martha, flushed from her propinquity to the stove, looked up and laughed. "I didn't know I made you."

"Well . . . you did. . . . Isn't there anything else I can do to help you?"

"I don't think so; we'll have to wait a few minutes . . ."

Egan was happily ignorant of the effect of the apron.

"One way and another, you've pretty nearly managed my life for me since I came back."

She laughed again. "Well, if I have, I hope you like the way I've done it."

"I almost do," said Egan gravely. Here their eyes met, and both of them moved imperceptibly backwards. They watched the stove for a moment. The pot refused to boil.

"I hope you're as happy about everything as my father is," she observed absently.

"Oh! Is he so happy?"

"Yes." She looked at him sidewise. "Perhaps you'd never guess it, but he's one of the most sensitive men I ever knew."

"No; I wouldn't have imagined that."

"It's meant ever so much more to him to have you go with the Company than it has to you. I'm pretty sure you know why, too . . . don't you? And if you could get just a little more confidence in each other, he'd tell you lots of things."

"What sort of things?"

"I really can't . . . ooh, Bronson, it's boiling!" She snatched frantically, burned her fingers not quite enough to precipitate a climax; and Egan, snatching to help her, burned his so briskly that for the space of several minutes he lived wholly in the immediate present. After that, he had leisure to be inspired by the recollection that she had called him "Bronson." In spite of their mutual comprehensions, it was the first time. For the remainder of the evening, although he hadn't another word with her in private, and for the most part sat separated from her by a dozen feet, he felt as near to her as though they had embraced.

He remained for a week in Dayton, and after the

first night, he stayed at the Hendersons'. Conscience rebuked him doubly; once because Martha lived in that house; and once because Henderson lived there.

The Martha part of it he could manage to discount; for he assured himself that not the mere circumstance itself, but only his behaviour towards it, could deserve censure. But in regard to Henderson, he had to confess that he was uncertain. He had begun to respect Henderson for a few definite virtues; he could manage even to like some of Henderson's personal qualities. He owed his present high status in life entirely to Henderson, but perhaps he owed a part of the paternal catastrophe to Henderson, too. He would have given much to know which of them rested under the greater obligation.

He daily excused himself on the ground of expediency. He had always maintained that his chief reason for joining the Air Traffic forces was to study Henderson and his methods at close quarters. He tried to persuade himself that his residence with Henderson was for the same purpose. But there was no denying that his theory was equivocal. Egan knew it. He should either accept the man's hospitality unconditionally, or reject it likewise; and not accept it simply to be near Martha.

Nothing could have shaken his inherited dogmatism more profoundly than this close association with Henderson.

"The thing that bothers me the most," his host said to him one evening, "is education. Out here in Ohio I can scrabble along all right — there's so many others in the same boat. Most of us started the same way.

But in New York — and Philadelphia — and Boston! My God, they act as if they think a man must be either crooked or incompetent if he didn't go to college somewhere. And if he ever worked with his hands, he's got the gate before he starts. I'd give my shirt to have it to do over again!"

"You'd have gone to college, Mr. Henderson?"

"Worked through, yes. I know it's no joke to do that, but it pays. I can see it now. Then, I thought it was wasted time. Quit school when I was sixteen, and took to a trade."

"What was it, Mr. Henderson?"

"Oh, I got to be an instrument-maker." He laughed. "Maybe you wouldn't guess it, but it's still sort of hard for me to remember sometimes that I don't represent a union. When I'm talking to a capitalist, and he says something capitalistic I get just as belligerent as if I was on the other side of the fence yet. Never got over it. But — oh, I worked and I studied and I read. Read everything I could lay my hands on. The point ain't that I've got three thousand books in that library there — but I've read 'em. You've noticed they're mostly technical. And — oh, it worked out pretty well. All except that one thing. When I get real mad, I can't get mad like an educated man, I get mad like a workingman." He regarded Egan tentatively. "That's why your dad and I fell out."

Egan made no comment, but his attitude was inviting.

"We had a conference one time about a trade arrangement to divide up competing lines so we wouldn't cut each other's throats too much. And he was an awful good trader. I guess I thought he was too good,

and he thought I was out to get something for nothing. And you know how he was when he got mad. Like a piece of granite. Like a turtle in a shell. That always stirs me up; I could always fight with my hands and I could always fight with my mouth, but I never could fight keeping still. So I said a lot. Oh — a lot! Probably no worse than what he was thinking, but he didn't say it. And it was pretty rough — that's what I'm telling you. And the very next day he went and made a deal with George Kent, and I accused him of using what I'd told him the day before as a sledge to use on Kent — and that's that." The big man gestured. "Bronson, my reputation in Plainfield's based on that. Not another damned thing. Your dad's opinion. I was wrong and he was wrong. But your dad and George Kent thought I was a roughneck. That made 'em think I was unprincipled. That made 'em look for trouble. Every mistake in a bill of goods to Plainfield just made 'em keep on saying Henderson's trying to put something over. Every hold-up on delivery. Every claim. Every everything. But if you ask 'em in *Dayton* . . ."

The reason for Egan's silence was founded exactly upon this point. He had quietly been asking 'em in Dayton. And either Dayton had been hoodwinked for twenty years, or Old Man Egan had made a rotten bad appraisal of Martin Henderson.

"You're not fond of Kent, then I take it?"

"No."

"Nor Eddie Macklin?"

"Humph!" Henderson's mouth expressed his scorn. "I'll give you an idea of that chap's value. When the

Citizens Trust was going to sell your stock, he sent me word in a roundabout way — suggested I buy it so as to grab your control away from you! Wanted twenty per cent commission for giving me the information. And your dad dying at the time!"

"And you said —"

"I said I'd put him out of politics for it. He tried to tell me that somebody was going to buy your stock, and it might as well be me. I wish I had, now; I wouldn't have made the mess of it that those fellows did. But I said I'd put him out, and I'm doing it. Now. This minute. The idea of his sending me word he had the biggest chance of a lifetime — and I got up at two o'clock in the morning to take the Owl because he said every minute counted!"

Egan said nothing, immediately. But he thought much. And when he had arrived at the terminal of his thoughts, he had done what is perhaps the hardest thing for any high-spirited young man to do in cold blood. He gave Henderson a tacit apology for an unspoken opinion about him. But he couldn't say it aloud. Henderson was too big and too sincere, to let him say it.

"That's mighty interesting." He was inclined to tell Henderson how George Kent had blazed up at the mere mention of this incident, but he decided that there was little use in extending the radius of the information. Judge Perkins and Stanley Adams were already acting upon it.

He had a number of pleasant opportunities to make the better acquaintance of Martha, and pleasantly he

made it. She reminded him so much of Mary. He religiously counted the days before he could return to Mary's neighbourhood. Once he said to himself "must" instead of "could," and he was awed by the substitution. His ancient affection for Mary had never waned, but the expression of its present degree was difficult. He had felt that in view of her engagement, the expression of it was almost unmoral. And to a man of Egan's nature, there arose a set of inhibitions around the things he couldn't express. His affection for her had become almost dogged, to prevent him from forgetting that he had it.

His mission in Dayton was to end on Saturday, and out of sheer ancestral arbitrariness, he determined to go to Plainfield on Saturday night, because he held that to linger over the following Sunday would be a compromise he wasn't prepared to make. To be sure, Mary would have no time for him on Sunday, and Martha would have plenty, but this wasn't the point. He argued that it was inconsistent of him to enjoy himself.

Henderson picked him up at the local field at five o'clock, and drove him home. In the living-room, Martha was peacefully embroidering.

"I had a letter from Mary with some Plainfield news in it for you," she said. "Eddie Macklin wasn't even nominated for Mayor!"

"That happened yesterday, Martie," said Henderson, in kind confirmation. "I meant to tell you at breakfast."

Egan grew red. "Not even nominated?" He was striving to bury his satisfaction; honestly trying not to gloat. His pleasure wasn't malicious; Macklin's de-

feat seemed to him the best possible thing for the community.

Henderson put his hand on Egan's shoulder. "That was settled weeks ago. I thought you had foresight, Bronson. The meeting when you were elected a director."

Egan dimly recalled what Little Johnny Jones had said to him about submarine politics. "Was that — did that make any difference?"

The capitalist nodded.

"You've got to bear in mind, my boy, that that little directorate of ours represents the seventeen biggest manufacturing businesses in Plainfield, both the papers, all the banks, and then some. We don't control politics; we *are* politics. That meeting was more of a try-out than anything else. Me and George Kent. We had a show-down that afternoon. Eddie didn't get one single, solitary vote. So we beat him yesterday without using even half of our ammunition. Adams. I'm glad we kept that out of it; aren't you?"

"Yes, but . . . but I don't see —"

Egan was bewildered by Henderson's apparent omniscience.

"Didn't you know that Ed couldn't get anywhere without Kent, and Kent's friends?"

"Why, I —"

"When the directors outvoted Kent that afternoon — for the first time in his life — it meant good-bye for Eddie. They've done with him. He's no good to 'em from now on, and if they pushed him for Mayor it would have cost too much money. I'll spare your blushes, and leave out some of it. But —"

"But, Mr. Henderson. When you live *here*, and —"

Henderson nodded again. "I own both your papers, though, and I've got all the way from five to fifty per cent interests in a dozen different concerns over there. I'm going to move over bag and baggage next year. I don't mix into politics much, but when I do — I don't always need the sort of campaign material that your acquaintance Adams showed me the last time I was over there."

Egan gulped. "You own the *Times?*"

"Through a Jersey holding company. What's the matter?"

"When did you buy it, Mr. Henderson?"

"Oh, about a month ago. Just before that meeting. I bought the *Herald* the same week. Why?"

Egan relaxed. "Nothing."

Martha, who had been listening intently, rose. "You ought to have told me you'd bought the *Times*," she said reproachfully. "It's time to get ready for dinner — but you ought to have told me. There's a man there you've simply *got* to have discharged."

Henderson's face clouded. "Careful, Martie. And listen, both of you. You're not to mention outside that I've got any interest in either of those papers. It isn't time yet. Remember?"

"No," said Martha. "I won't be careful. I mean it. The man who wrote that awful piece about Bronson. I want him discharged."

"He went long ago," said Henderson, on the threshold.

At dinner, they talked chiefly of aerial navigation, and of the enterprise in which they all were chiefly interested.

"Of course you know," said Henderson over the salad, "I expect we'll fail, don't you?"

Egan and Martha had stared at him in equal consternation.

"Yes," said Henderson thoughtfully, "I expect we will. I don't see how we can help it."

"But, Father! What made you go into it if you thought —"

"What's happened to the first steamship lines? Or the first railroad companies? Or even the first few automobile companies?"

Egan laid down his fork. "Haven't we advantages they didn't have? And capital? And patience?"

"But we'll probably fail . . . Martie, I don't do everything just for the money there is in it. This is something bigger. Maybe there wouldn't be many men to agree with me, but I'd feel more like bragging about my great-great-grandfather if he'd backed Robert Fulton and gone broke than if he'd taken shares in a West Indiaman for rum and molasses, and made a fortune. We're frontiersmen in this thing — and they're the ones who blaze the trail. They're the ones who work like dogs to lay out the lines, and make it easy for the second generation to build roads, and the third generation to buy Pullman tickets. We've got to fail, Bronson — as every scheme that's aimed at world-utility has got to fail. I dare say we've got one chance in ten thousand."

Egan was fundamentally distraught. "Do you mean to say you went into this expecting to lose?"

"Why not? Wasn't there a bird they called a Phœnix? He had a fine trait in him. You could broil him for supper, and he'd sort of get up, and walk off the dish, and call it another day. . . . We're like that. We may fail — not that we'll try to — but if we do, we'll have gone a big jump ahead. The next war'll be in the air. The next great channel of transportation'll be in the air. This company's a mile behind the others already. I'm simply buying some Liberty bonds on the future. You'll wear a uniform again before you're thirty-five, Bronson. And you and I'll be in a position to do some constructive good." He caught Egan's eye. "If we *should* fail, don't be afraid I won't take good care of you —"

"I wasn't thinking altogether of that . . ."

"I know; but you thought a little about it. Well, don't you worry."

"Do you think all these new companies will go under, then?"

"The majority — the great majority. Survival of the fittest. The whole thing's changing so fast. A novelty today's obsolete tomorrow. That's why. But if we go under with the rest, Bronson —"

Martha laughed. "You'll walk off the dish and call it another day, Father?"

"That's how we get along," said Henderson. He beamed at Egan. "I've got another dish for you to walk off of as soon as you're ready, son. Richards is quitting."

"Is that so?"

"By request," said Henderson. "How'd you like to take his place?"

Egan was thrilled, but shook his head. "I . . . I don't believe I can swing it — yet, Mr. Henderson."

"That's what I thought you'd say — so we're boosting your salary instead."

Egan's train was scheduled to leave at 9.40, so that after dinner, and the customary cigar with Henderson, there remained only the fraction of an hour for a last interlude with Martha. Her father had considerately pleaded a deep desire for some modern literature, and wandered into the library, noiselessly closing the door in order that he shouldn't be disturbed.

Before the open fire the two young people sat silently, for at least half of their allotment. In the fire, they each saw countless fantasies not to be disclosed. Both were self-congratulatory that they had come through this week without the need of regret.

At length Egan coughed, and not as a symptom. "I couldn't go away without letting you know I'm friends with your father."

She turned radiantly. "Oh, Bronson! That's the best thing —"

"It's a funny world," said Egan. "Darned funny . . ."

She put out her hand to him, and he held it for a swift instant of comprehension before she withdrew it. The clock continued its relentless pacing-off of the evening.

"I'm so glad to have had you here this week," she said, her chin resting on her palm.

"You're no gladder than I am."

"Yes, I think I am. I've learned to know you so well. So much that I never *would* have known."

Egan couldn't keep his eyes from her, and his eyes sent burning despatches to his heart. She was perilously dear to him, and the certainty of leaving her tonight brought gloom to his innermost soul. Out of this gloom, he was rudely shaken by the sudden realization that he wanted to snatch her in his arms . . .

"Weren't we going to keep on being friends?"

"Yes, but —"

The drumming of his heart affected his tongue, and made him stammer.

"I expect to be in Dayton pretty often — and then if you come to live in Plainfield —"

"It wouldn't be the same again," she said. There was strong essence of regret in her tone, and yet she wasn't fencing. She was voicing a genuine feeling. That was a splendid trait of Martha's; you could bank on what she said.

"Not ever?"

"Not ever."

Egan leaned far towards her.

"What's the matter? Are you going to treat me so very differently after this?"

"It isn't about me — it's about you."

"*What* is?" he demanded.

She sat up, and looked across at him. Her eyes were very soft and expressive; Egan was vaguely suspicious of a shadow of pity in them.

"I told you you'd win — didn't I? There was something else in my letter. I didn't want to tell you be-

fore Father. About Mr. Macklin. But you ought to know before you get there — you'd want to."

Egan's pulse quickened. "What's happened to him?"

Martha smiled. Not so much pity now — a gentle smile, in which was summed up all that she never might say to him.

"Mary's broken her engagement, Bronson."

XXVII

AFTER mature reflection it seemed to Egan hardly fitting for him to call at once on Mary Kent. He was relieved that his tact laid this injunction on him, for in sober earnest he was loath to call. Things had been going crossways, and he wanted plenty of latitude to think them over. The prospect of G. Willoughby Kent as a father-in-law had definitely ceased to be alluring. The prospect of Mary as a wife — an unequivocal, everyday wife — was startling. He had never really visualized her, until now, as a wife. He had thought of her only as a sort of perpetual fiancée. Wifehood as a career was palpably unsuited to Mary. She would belong not to her husband, but to society. Yet he had made her a reversionary proposal. Automatically, that proposal became effective on the moment that she turned aside from Eddie Macklin. And she was said to have turned.

He had hurried away from Martha for Mary's sake, but he kept away from Mary that Sunday for his own sake. He went out alone over the frozen roads to the flying fields, and found a certain perversive comfort in the grey bitterness of the weather. He tried desperately hard to think of Mary, and to think of her exclusively, because he felt that it was the only right thing for him to do. But the task of arguing himself into acute concentration was beyond him. He was ashamed of the weakness of his resolution; he called himself harsh names, and fancied that he was beyond redemption.

He didn't realize, then, that no man has ever been the despotic master of his thoughts, not even at a funeral.

For a single instant, he could compel himself to concentrate on Mary. Mary — whom he had adored since boyhood. He remembered fighting Eddie Macklin for her after school. He remembered how Eddie had bitten him. He grinned reminiscently as he found himself touching his ear. That same ear had been frost-bitten in the Vosges. A cruel country, that — and these iron-rutted roads, by comparison, were splendid boulevards. He had a swift vision of his last ambulance, turned upwards in an icy ditch, and wriggling its wheels like some monstrosity of an insect. But it wasn't funny, especially for the men inside. One of them had recovered, and won a D. S. C. His name was Bergwasser, and he came from . . . oh, Lord! What *was* the name of the place that man came from? Never mind. Well — oh, there was Mary. Pretty — yes, superlatively. Sweet dispositioned — yes, but — But what on earth *was* the name of the place Bergwasser came from? Good old Bergwasser. Used to tell about his father's little tannery, just ready to fail when the war broke out and Russian roubles made him a rich man. War profits — a nice thing to tell your grandchildren. Plainfield had made millions — tens of millions. Kent had probably made four or five himself. And The Egan Company had gone by the board. That skunk Macklin! That man — and Mary. To be sure — Mary. What could she have seen in him? Poor Mary. Dear little Mary. She — Eureka! The name of the place Bergwasser came from was Waupoos, Iowa!

But when Martha Henderson became all at once a

passenger on his train of dreams, that train never halted, nor turned out on a siding, nor wrecked on a matter of geography.

He sat huddled on the steps of the little administration building to smoke a cheerless cigarette. Ethics were hampering devices for the accurate calibration of a man's soul. He felt that he must be a scoundrel for harbouring all these curious reflexes, and yet he couldn't feel as scoundrelly as he thought he ought to. He had read somewhere that when a man charges himself with any serious defect, he is merely self-conscious of his own self-esteem,— for privately, the average man would still consider himself to be a pretty decent fellow, in spite of the defect. He wondered if he were as conceited as all that. It was so horribly unsatisfying to be in doubt about it. He wondered if it were indeed scoundrelly to consider this particular obligation towards Mary in the same light as he would normally consider any conceivable obligation, except this one. The obligation itself was basically imaginary. There was only one party to it — himself. Mary had been engaged to Macklin at the time, and she had promised nothing. Egan had stated to her a fact, and an intention. The fact was that he loved her. The intention referred to marriage by victory over Macklin. The past facts may not necessarily be present facts. This one wasn't. Intentions, weathered by experience, can crumble without depositing so much as a dusty residue of regret. These had. Would it be fair to Mary — would it *not* be fair to Mary — to tell her the truth and have done with it?

Ordinarily, it wasn't a thing to be done. Chivalry

forbade. Chivalry would condemn a man to hold his tongue, and two or ten or twenty years later the woman would condemn him because, forsooth, he had held it. She would ferret out the secret, sooner or later. Then she would hate him. What was the best course to take? The greatest good for the greatest number? Martha, Mary, and Egan. Two out of three. Marriage is no fulfilment of an obligation, but the beginning of countless millions of petty obligations, legal and moral, personal and social, daily, unending. Death is the only fulfilment — and even then, only after mutual happiness.

He knew that he had no longer the desire to marry her. He *had* loved her — but if he had taken no personal credit for what was absolutely beyond the freedom of his will, why should he take discredit on himself, now, for what he was equally powerless to control? He would once have married her, and she hadn't waited for him to come back. Was there less mutuality in a betrothal than in a marriage? Legally, of course . . . but except for the wedding ceremony, law comes in only to sweep up the shattered fragments of love . . .

What would a sincere woman do if she found that she had given her promise too soon, and to the wrong man? What had Mary herself done? First, to Egan, in regard to their unofficial "understanding"; secondly to Macklin, when the engagement had been more formal. What was right for a man to do? What was just? What was fair?

The stubble before him was littered with half-smoked cigarettes. Egan rose, shivering. Mechanically, as he set out for home, he concentrated upon the virtues,

the delicacies, the womanly qualifications of Mary. Unwittingly, he was trying to persuade himself back into that era when he had loved her. He was the same now,— she was the same now,— as they used to be. What diabolic influence had altered him? He was compelled to blame himself without a cause. Revile himself. But he said fiercely to his conscience that he would hold to his word, and let somebody else usurp the woman's privilege, if he liked.

And all that had happened was that Egan had lived a little longer, and all there was to blame — how could he ever have admitted it, even if he had known? — was the soul of the world and the flight of time.

To blame? To blame a man for the unfathomable workings of the universe? For the ungovernable twistings and turnings of the human mind?

Suddenly his face lighted, and Egan smiled. The peace of God isn't the only phenomenon which passes all understanding. His whole life hung on the decision he had made today, yet suddenly, out of the gloom, Egan smiled, and the lines momentarily vanished from his forehead.

Waupoos!

In the next instant, his own littleness was never clearer to him.

He had hardly set foot in the hallway when Stanley Adams appeared at the door of his room. Adams had the strained expression of Sister Anne, but a slightly different vocabulary. "Bronson! Where in *hell* have you been all day? We've been waiting for you since two o'clock."

Egan wearily climbed the last few steps. "I'm pretty tired, Uncle Stanley. Can't you wait awhile?"

The journalist took his arm. "No, we can't. Bill Garrity's here!"

The greater part of his fatigue dropped away from Egan.

"Really?"

"Yes, and he's ready to talk. He's scared stiff. Come on in. You can't afford to be tired now."

The room, as Egan entered it, was dense with cigar smoke hanging in close-packed, mica-like layers. The Honourable George Perkins, coatless, was tipped back in his chair against the wall, a ruminative Daniel. In the middle of the room sat Garrity, middle-aged, short, stocky, shiny-headed, painfully-dressed in a seventy-dollar suit of clothes and a twenty-five-cent necktie.

The judge, maintaining his balance, waved a welcoming hand.

"Hello, boy — have a good trip?"

"Fine, thank you."

"You know Bill Garrity, of course."

"Oh, yes." Egan shook hands with him.

"You've growed some," said Garrity, as a conventional form of address.

"I have — a little." He sat down on the edge of Adams' bed. "What's the conference about?"

After a faintly uncomfortable pause, Perkins threw out a feeler. "Garrity's a friend of ours, Bronson."

"I was sure of that," said Egan cordially.

"He had some news he thought we'd like to know, so he brought it to us. To you especially."

The explanation was plausible enough, but Egan

could see at a glance that Garrity was nervous. The former superintendent had put on his hat, raking it backwards to an acute angle; and his feet were alternately tapping the floor. His linen collar, barely three-quarters of an inch high, but already five-eighths of an inch too much, was slowly liquefying.

"That's good," said Egan, pleasantly.

Garrity gazed at him without speaking.

"Now that we're all here," suggested the Judge.

Garrity drew a tremendous breath. He looked from one to the other of the trio, looked at the floor. "Am I to begin, then, your Honour?"

"Yes, Garrity — go ahead."

"So I will, then." He focussed intently on the carpet. "Twenty years did I slave and labour for Old Man Egan, and devil a chance did I have, and no one else, neither, for the Old Man he carried the business under his hat, like, and he was president and treasurer and manager and superintendent and office-boy and all, no matter what we was called that worked under him."

Egan, fascinated, bent his head a little nearer, for Garrity's voice was very low.

"When he was took sick, there was neither head nor tail to us, not knowin', as they say in the west of Ireland, which was the why nor for ever after. One day comes a letter from the Citizens Bank which I and the bookkeeper opens, and we find it's about a big sum of money owed that we know nothin' about, so I and the bookkeeper goes to the bank and sees Mr. Luke. 'Garrity,' he says, 'this don't concern you. This is a bit of private business betwixt this bank and your boss.

Chase yourself out of here.' 'Tell me, then,' I says, 'what I'd best do with it, for the Old Man is sick, and who is his lawyer I dunno, now Judge Perkins and him is on the outs.' 'Garrity,' he says, 'you go to Eddie Macklin. He's a good lawyer, and he'll see to the Old Man's interest.' So I go to Eddie, and I go back to my work."

Adams glanced at Egan. "Dovetails nicely, doesn't it?"

"Eddie comes to me, bye an' bye. 'The Old Man has hocked some of his own stock, and cannot buy it out of the bank,' he says, 'and the bank will sell it to the high dollar on Saturday week. If you've ready money, you can buy cheap. Give me what you've saved, and I'll get it for you.' I had always wanted stock. I give him all I had; he bought the stock Saturday; the Old Man died Tuesday. Wednesday, Eddie comes to me. 'Bill,' he says, 'we'll make you president of Egan's.' 'Do you mean it?' I says. 'I do,' he says. 'On one condition. The plant must cut down its costs.' 'Cut *wages?*' I says. 'Cut *costs*,' he says."

The Honourable George silently proffered another cigar, which Garrity proceeded to smoke dry.

"'Drive the men harder,' he says, 'and save payin' overtime. Put the whole crowd on piece-work.' 'There'll be big trouble,' I says. 'The men will never stand for it.' 'Then we'll replace them,' he says. 'Replace hell,' I says. 'In *these* days? Bull! Am I to watch my own money be throwed away?' 'That's all right,' he says, 'we will replace them. Kent is in Washington, and he'll frame a deal with a man called Darragh de Lancey, who is practically the director of

the war business. This de Lancey can have skilled workmen furloughed out of the Army and sent us to complete our gover'ment contracts. They'll be glad to get furloughed to keep out of the trenches, and we'll get all the men we want at our own terms. Another thing,' he says, 'if we are to get soldiers, we must show a clean slate. Every man with a Dutch name must go.'"

Adams coughed gently to direct Egan's attention.

"There was trouble on the piece-work, and after a while, the boys voted to strike. 'Tell them to strike and be damned,' says Eddie. 'If they don't come back, Kent'll help us from Washington.' So the boys went out, but all we got from Washington was an order to behave. 'Take them back, then,' says Eddie, 'and you and me will have a talk with Colonel Kent, who is home from Washington.' So we have a talk. 'Are the boys dissatisfied?' says he. 'They are,' says I, 'unimously.' 'We'd best clean house, then,' he says, 'before the Labour Department begins on us. I can arrange matters. Keep up the disc*ip*line. If the men is dissatisfied, leave them drift off. We will have soldiers furloughed and save money.' He shows me a clipping from a newspaper where hundreds of men is furloughed for the cartridge brass industry, and I am convinced. The men is dissatisfied, and they drift. One day we're with half the machines standin' idle. Kent and Eddie is both out of town. I send a telegram to this here de Lancey, askin' where are the soldiers. Two days later, we are notified our steel delivery is to be cut two-thirds. The same day I hear from this de Lancey. He says he never heard of us in all his life,

nor Kent, neither. Eddie is home over Sunday. 'What you've done,' he says to me, 'is to gum the whole game. You'd better have kept your face shut. You've put Kent in a hell of a hole. You're lucky if you ain't indicted. You blew the secret of what we aimed to do by the furlough, and that's why they stopped your steel.' 'What do I do now?' I says. 'Close down?' 'Close down is right,' he says, 'and keep your face closed down while I get in touch with Kent and fix this up. We'll be runnin' full blast again in two weeks.' So we close down, but we wasn't runnin' again in two weeks, nor four. Eddie comes to me. 'The city will take back its land,' he says, 'and The Egan Company has bust. You did it,' he says. 'Your damn fool telegram did it. You killed the best business in Plainfield. I know you lose you ten thou,' he says, 'but other folks lose fifty to your one. If you peep,' he says, 'you'll likely land in the cooler. Kent is crazy. Go get a job and forget it, and some day when Kent is cooled down I'll see you get your money back *provided* you keep your face shut.' So I get a job, but I don't forget it. Then there is trouble in politics in this town, and both ends is against the middle, and I am part of the middle. Kent has sent for me, and Eddie has sent for me, and I see where I am the goat. But goat or no goat, I'll stand by an Egan until the last trump. I am convinced since yesterday morning there was a dirty trick there at the plant. So I come to you, and here I am."

He finished wearily, and continued to stare at the carpet.

"I suppose you'd be willing to sign an affidavit, wouldn't you?" asked Adams, breaking the silence.

Garrity lifted his head. He answered Adams, but he looked at Egan.

"I'll sign anything the Judge says. He's my lawyer."

"We'll draw it up tonight."

"Not tonight," said Garrity. "I got to go to Cleveland. My sister's sick. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon."

"Tomorrow night, then." The Judge sighed with relief. "Well, I guess that clears the path for us, gentlemen."

He smiled broadly, but Egan, confronted at last by the certainty that his father's old friend and Mary's father had planned his strategy of destruction, was so infinitely depressed that nothing could have wrung an answering smile from him. Not even Waupoos. Not even what Garrity, on his feet for departure, was babbling in loyal eulogy of Old Man Egan.

XXVIII

AT the usual hour on Monday, Egan was in his office, and he remained there throughout the greater part of the day, although his mind was absent without leave. He was so detached from his duties that the announcement of Hoyt as general manager and himself as assistant could hardly wring a word of satisfaction from him; nor could the choice of a new advertising executive stir him to congratulation. At four o'clock, sedulously avoiding Adams, he slipped out and went to the Metropolitan Club for private meditation, and to perform a friendly service for a friend. At five o'clock, a boy brought the message to the writing room that a caller was waiting for Egan downstairs, and Egan, delaying only long enough to seal an envelope, went down. The caller was a young man in a strikingly checked suit and vivid haberdashery, set off by numerous articles of diamond jewelry.

"Why, Mr. Feinberg!" said Egan.

The young man approached him nervously. "Howdy-do, Mr. Egan. Long time since we met each other, ain't it?" He attached himself by thumb and forefinger to the lapel of Egan's coat. "You know something? I got a friend of mine wants to do some business with you. I got a oitermobile outside here. Ninety cents a hour. They told me at your office you'd be here or home, and you wasn't home, so I come here. Just a couple minutes. It's no fake — honest."

Egan tried to detach himself, but the jewelry salesman wouldn't let go.

"Who is it?"

"E — M," said Mr. Feinberg, mysteriously.

"Oh! What's the idea of sending you here? Why didn't he come himself?"

"He couldn't. . . . Say, this is an elegant clubhouse, ain't it?"

"Well, why didn't he telephone?"

"He couldn't do that, either."

"Why not?"

"Well, he couldn't. I tell you, it's no fake, Mr. Egan. I'm payin' ninety cents by the hour. He —"

"You can tell him for me," said Egan shortly, "that if he wants to see me, he can come here." He succeeded in freeing his lapel, but the jewelry salesman promptly caught him by the sleeve.

"I ask you please, Mr. Egan, be a good sport. I wouldn't come here only if it wasn't important. It won't take you hardly any time at all. It's no fake. Honest. It's about . . . *you* know." He danced back impressively. "He said I should tell you it's to . . . *you* know."

"No, I don't," said Egan impatiently. "And I don't think I care a whale of a lot, either."

"Well, it's no fake. I give you my word of honour, Mr. Egan. It's worth going for. Please hurry up, Mr. Egan."

Egan wavered. "And he can't come here?"

"No, sir. If he could, he would have. Honest. It's just like I said. I should bring you back just as

soon as I could. I got a car outside here now, and it won't cost you a cent."

"Well —"

Feinberg stopped him as he turned. "Please don't tell anybody, Mr. Egan. Please. You shouldn't worry. Honest. Don't say a word. It's important you shouldn't."

Egan stopped wavering.

"All right," he said. "I'll be with you as soon as I can get my coat and hat, and leave something at the office."

At the hall desk, he wrote the superscription "Board of Governors" on the envelope in his hand. Within, was the petition which would release Adams' suspension, and place him on active membership in the club once more.

The door of the small house was opened by an acidulous young woman with an oil lamp in her hand. At sight of Feinberg, she stood aside to permit the pair to enter.

"Go right in the poller," she said unemotionally. Egan, entering the poller, was immediately alone. Feinberg had remained in the hall, and closed the door.

For an instant, Egan was expectant of surprise, but he dismissed the thought of ambush with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, and gave himself to a critical inspection of the room. It was a very low-ceiled apartment, lighted by a large kerosene lamp, and luxuriously furnished in red plush. The carpet was Brussels, with cabbage-sized roses on it. Egan's eyes were soothed by

antimacassars, wax-fruit displays underneath glass bells, crayon enlargements surrounded by elaborate gilt frames, and a glorious array of prisms dangling from the gasolier which sprouted downward from a plaster rosette in the ceiling. Distinctly not a room in which melodrama would feel at home.

The door opened again, and Egan turned back.

"Hello, Eddie."

His ancient enemy didn't offer to shake hands. "I'm glad you came, Bronson."

"Always happy to oblige."

"You're mighty decent to come, anyway."

Egan felt it himself.

"Whose place is this?"

"My mother's. Let's sit down. . . . Smoke a cigarette?"

"I have some, thanks."

"Matches?"

"Much obliged."

Macklin sat down, his feet profaning one of the roses which, except on the occasion of two funerals and a few ministerial visitations, had never seen the full light of day since it was transplanted there. His look to Egan was unusually direct.

"You've won, of course you know," he said in an undertone.

Egan's heart thumped. — "Won? How do you mean?"

Macklin acted as though his nerves had been crushed.

"The first night you were back? Remember you said there wasn't room for both of us in the same town? Well, I'm leaving."

His despondency was so profound that Egan, even at this long-wished-for instant of complete success, could almost be sorry for him — almost.

"Is that so?" His tone was a challenge.

"I hope it is." Macklin's hands twitched uncontrollably. "You can make it sure if you want to. I thought under all the circumstances you might want to."

"How?"

Macklin blew a volley of smoke squarely into the outraged features of a lugubrious hypocrite in a crayon enlargement. "Help me get away."

Egan laughed. "Isn't that rather a large order? Under all the circumstances?"

"It is, and it isn't. I want to get to St. Louis."

"Why St. Louis?"

"That's *my* business, Bronson."

"Well, the railroad's still running."

"But I can't take it."

"You can't expect me to help you with —"

"I don't suppose I ought to expect you to lift a finger. Only I do. I'm banking on it."

Egan inspected him minutely. "I'd like to hear a little more about it, Eddie." His sense of triumph was atrophied. The victory was too hollow. And it was highly doubtful if it would be to Egan's interest to let Macklin set foot outside the state.

Macklin was quivering as from an attack of palsy. "All I want to do is to begin over again. Start with a clean slate. I've got a lawyer friend in St. Louis who'll give me a job. . . . What I want to do is to get out of here fast, and not have too many people know I'm

getting out. After two days, I don't care. Nobody's going to chase me, except maybe you. I thought we might have an understanding for good and all. After that, you can do as you like. But I want to get out of Plainfield before anybody knows I'm gone, or where I'm going. I sent for you so I could put all the cards on the table, and find out just what your ideas are." He flipped the butt of his cigarette into a hand-painted china plate on the table, and got to his feet. "Bronson, it's a rotten crooked world. God knows I've tried to play the game square, but it don't work. Unless you've got money, you can't afford to be square. I'll tell you why I'm going out — because I was too damned honest. I'm in wrong everywhere." He sat down again. "Oh, I know you've been chumming with Henderson, and your pal Adams has been pumping Bill Garrity — but the only man who can fill in the chinks is me. I'm going to do it. . . . Can we bargain?"

Egan, triumphant, was still judicial. "I don't see yet why you need me. Why don't you just go, if you want to? And if you think you can get away with it."

Macklin regarded him sharply. "I'm going to put my head in the noose. You'd find it out anyway. I tell you, I'm banking on you. And you've always misjudged me. I don't want you to this time. I'd rather have you believe me than any other man I ever knew, and that's no bull, either. If you won't give me a lift . . ." He fingered his throat as though it hurt him. "Bronson, it was Kent and his crowd made me city counsel. I was straight as a string, by God, until they began to get after me for favours. One day Kent asked me for some legal advice — quite on the side — on

some little matter of his, and after I'd given it to him, he wanted to know the fee. 'Ten dollars,' I said. He gave me a bill — it was in his office, and his secretary was there. I put it in my pocket. Next time I had to buy cigarettes, I hauled out this bill. It was a hundred dollar bill. I went back to Kent. 'That's O. K.,' he said to me. 'That's O. K. Call it a retainer — you can do more for me, on the side, from time to time.' I needed that money, Bronson. I've got a mother and sister. . . . Like a damned fool, I deposited it. I bank in the Citizens Trust. In the course of six months he paid me eleven hundred dollars. Luke paid me five hundred. I was giving them some advice, of course, but it wasn't worth *that*. . . . Still, I couldn't see any harm in it."

"Couldn't you, Eddie?" Egan marvelled at his own forbearance.

Macklin shook his head. "Then Kent wanted the city to buy the Light and Power Company, and my original opinion was that the city couldn't do it legally. Kent sent for me." He had to clear his throat before he could continue. "Marked bills . . . all of 'em. The teller'd made memos of them, and had 'em in an envelope. Damn it, Bronson, everybody knew I never'd charged more'n ten dollars for two minutes' advice when I had a private practice, and a city attorney hasn't any right to take money on the outside anyhow. . . . He sort of had me."

"You were a fool, Eddie."

"Am I the only one? . . . So the city bought the Light and Power Company from Kent at double its value, and he gave me a thousand dollars and promised

to make me Mayor. Then your father got sick, and that note deal came up. Kent got ready to have the bank jump on the note itself, and pick up some loose change from the Old Man when he had to buy his stock back. Then Kent got the idea that he'd make more money if the Egan Company was out of it entirely. If he had a local monopoly, without even the Egan name in the way. He couldn't figure out how to force a consolidation without showing his teeth, and he didn't dare to do that. So he told me to advise all my old clients to chip in and buy that stock. And he got a lot of bolshevik talk circulated to keep the price down. The *Times* helped him out. I kicked like a steer, but he swore that one way or another he'd make up any losses the buyers had to take. He was gunning for the Company only.

" It happened that Henderson had been over here nosing around, and I'd met him, and I knew he was straight as a string, and no friend of Kent's. I tried to play fair. It wasn't safe to write or wire or telephone Henderson on any deal to put the skids under Kent — and then in pops this fellow Feinberg. I boarded in his house when I was in law school in Cleveland. I knew his cousin did hack work for Henderson,— it was his cousin who got me to board with him in the first place; we were in the same class at law school — Feinberg's about the only one that's sticking to me now, so I sent a tip over that way. I wanted Henderson to bid for that stock, and buy it, and spike Kent's game, and protect *you* fellows. Henderson would have been decent about it, and sold it back to you. And he wouldn't give me away to Kent. He came over, but he wouldn't

touch it. Thought it was a skunk trick — and thought I was a skunk to suggest it. I was going to charge him a legitimate commission, if he bought — and that would have let me square up with the world, and get clear. He thought I was crooked to suggest the commission. Of course I couldn't tell him how *I* was fixed. . . . Kent gave me some big money to buy stock with myself, so it would look better. We put Garrity in, and let him hang himself. Kent would have had a consolidation out of it, but he was scared of appearances, so we just killed it. I guess Garrity's told you how. The company'll liquidate so that Garrity and Mrs. McCain and the other people'll get their money back. I had to scare 'em all so they wouldn't tell they gave us their proxies. Kent wanted it thought they voted themselves. Kent made me hustle along the cancellation of your lease, and get it for him. Kent engineered the whole work. The other directors are just as innocent as you are. They knew Kent was interested, and a clever organizer, so they let him run things. They think it *had* to happen. It only cost Kent $30,000 all told to wreck your company for you. And then you came home. . . . Bronson, when I said I wanted to be friends with you, I meant it. When I said I could help you, I meant it. I was right on the edge of playing the game with you then . . . and you couldn't think of anything but the fight we had fifteen years ago. Well, that's over with. I stuck to Kent a while longer. How the devil could I get away? If I'd come to you then, you wouldn't have believed me under oath. Then you spilled the beans about meeting Henderson on the train, and Kent tumbled. Kent knows I'm no good to him now. He's

through with me. I'm too honest for him. And the crowd's against him now, so they're against me, too. There's nothing ahead here. I've got to get out. I need you to help me. I believe you will, too. I'll show you why."

He went out of the room a moment, and returned. There was some one with him. It was Mary Kent.

She came slowly towards Egan, stopped halfway. She was pale and nervous; it was obviously hard for her to speak.

"We're going away, Bronson," she said, barely above a whisper.

Egan looked at her, and looked at Macklin. His reason refused, temporarily, to accept the fact. He had been told that their engagement was broken. And it was contrary to his opinion of Mary that she should cleave to a broken reed like Macklin. Voluntary adversity was a sacrifice he had never dreamed her capable of making. The release of his own individuality was his second thought, not his first.

"You're — what?"

Her lower lip was trembling pitiably.

"I'm going away — with Eddie."

He could only look at her, mute. Macklin volunteered an explanation.

"Her father announced our engagement was broken, but it isn't so. It wasn't any of our doing. It was Mr. Kent's. He made her."

Something sprang up in Egan's throat, and made it arid. Her father had adopted the mediæval Florentine procedure of using the stiletto on his friends from be-

hind, and the mere circumstance of Mary's relationship to her father was enough to damn her, if it hadn't been that she was turning from him, too.

"So — you're going just the same?"

She nodded faintly. "Yes, Bronson." She edged towards Macklin, and he put his arm defiantly around her. Egan, watching them, was all at once visited by a new species of commiseration for Mary, and a new sort of pity for Macklin. Their mutual dependence, and their mutual faith at this crisis touched him deeply. Without logic, he knew that he should have to lend them aid. He knew that he should have to believe the narrative as Macklin had told it. And he knew that his heart wouldn't permit him to open fire on Mr. Kent while Mary was at home.

"Have you — left your home for good, Mary?"

Again she nodded. "I had to. It was awful, Bronson. We're going away and be married. I'm staying here until —"

"Until we decide what to do," said Macklin, his shoulders squared in protection. "I'm hoping you'll help us get off tonight or tomorrow morning."

Egan reverted to the obvious. "You could take a train, couldn't you?"

"No." Macklin shook his head. "That's exactly what we can't do. Not even if you don't try to stop me. They'll be looking for both of us, now."

"Don't they know where Mary is?"

"No."

"I . . . I just went," said Mary, helplessly. "They don't know where I am, but they know I've gone."

"They know it by now," said Macklin. "And

Kent'll have people at the station — and notify the trolley company to put the interurban conductors on guard. There . . . there was a pretty hot quarrel before she left, Bronson. About me — and us."

"Oh." Egan began abstractedly to pace up and down the small room. "So you think I ought to help you get away, do you?"

Macklin denied the obligation. "Far from it. There's plenty of reasons why you shouldn't. That's admitted. I've said all that already. There isn't any 'ought' about it. Only I've told you the truth. And I thought you're a big enough man. . . ." His voice trailed into silence.

Egan continued to pace the floor, but his thoughts were vividly disconnected. Presently, while he was yet unprepared to express himself, Mary detached herself from Macklin, and came to meet him. He paused, and gazed down at her, negatively conscious now that the last vestige of his schoolboy emotion for her had left him. He was still very fond of her, and very sorry for her, but that was all. He was sorry for her on Macklin's account as well as on his own. He would do whatever he could to help her. But to help Macklin? Even if the pairing of these two meant a permanent reprieve for himself?

"Bronson!" she said.

"Well?"

"I don't deserve it, Bronson — any of it."

"What don't you deserve, Mary?"

"What you think about me, and what Father thinks and — and everything." Tears filled her eyes. "I can't help it — and everybody's so unfair to Eddie.

We'd better just go away. Nobody wants us around here. Won't you please help us? Doesn't our old friendship mean anything? Can't we count on you now — the only time we've ever *had* to count on you? Because there's nobody else but you —"

As she put out her hand to touch his arm, Egan stepped back to the window. "Wait a minute," he said.

When he turned, they were just as he had left them; Mary, pathetic by the centre table, Eddie stolid at the mantel. "When could you be ready tomorrow morning?" he demanded. "Six o'clock?"

A spot of colour appeared in Mary's cheeks. Macklin, on the contrary, grew white. "Yes," he said. "Yes."

"Be at the field by six o'clock," said Egan. "You can have the 'Honeymoon Express' from here to Boyd Junction, Illinois. That's four hundred miles. With stops for gas, you'll get there by noon. That's the best I can do for you. You won't have room for more than three suit-cases. I'd bring something to eat, too. Your pilot won't ask any questions, and you don't have to pay any attention to him. I don't know when you can catch a train from the Junction to St. Louis, but you can find out, and the pilot'll arrange so that you don't have to wait too long there. His name'll be Utley. U-t-l-e-y. Will that do? It isn't much of any risk. It's all I can think of." He tried to ease the tension. "Mary always said she wanted one flight just for the experience."

"Bronson!" said Macklin, hushed. "That's ex-*act*ly what we'd hoped you'd do."

Egan reached for his hat. "I won't see you again, then. Everything will be ready for you. Just go out to the field and say you're the passengers that I arranged for." He offered his hand to Mary. "Goodbye, and good luck."

She looked inquiringly back at Macklin. "Go ahead," he said.

So that it came to pass precisely as Egan had promised more than six months ago. He hadn't laid a finger on Mary Kent until she took the initiative herself. But he hadn't imagined, then, that he should be quite so impassive when she kissed him.

Macklin ushered him to the outer door. "I know it isn't for me that you're doing this," he said, awkwardly. "Well — I don't believe I'll ever want to see Plainfield again, but if I can ever do anything for you. . . . It's sort of ticklish business, of course — with Mary's father — but if it's a case of devil take the hindmost — One last word. I didn't spike your guns for the Fair last fall. That is, not willingly. Kent was organizing Air Traffic, and made me. Do you think I won't come back to get a crack at him? Try me — that's all. . . . Won't you shake hands?"

With hardly noticeable hesitation, Egan did.

On Tuesday afternoon, he had a wire from them at Boyd Junction, and he was doubly relieved; once because they were safe, once because they were gone. But his relief was instantaneously removed from him when, shortly before the closing hour, Stanley Adams came in to his office very quietly, and closed the door.

"We're out of luck, Bronson," he said. "I came

over to tell you that the Cleveland express was wrecked in an open-switch accident at half past three."

Egan's brain leaped at the conclusion. "Garrity?"

"Killed," said Adams. "And there goes our star witness, and most of our case against Kent."

His expression was so extraordinary that Egan held back some of his dismay. There was an unbelieving sort of ecstasy behind Adams' seriousness — a dazed recognition of something almost too good to be true. Of a surety, this mood had nothing to do with Garrity, and the case against Kent. "Uncle Stanley! What's the . . . say it, man, say it!"

Adams was blinking rapidly.

"There was a theatrical troupe on the same train, Bronson . . ." He came close to Egan, and gripped him by the shoulder. "It's a funny thing, boy . . . it's funny as hell. . . . You know, I almost wish I could go to her funeral — but I just *can't!*"

Egan caught his breath. "Why — why, Uncle Stanley! I'm hanged if I don't believe I know exactly how you feel!"

XXIX

THERE was a solemn week during which Egan immured himself within the solitude of his own reflections. Every instinct impelled him to hurry to Dayton, but he relentlessly submerged them in cold restraint. He thought it would hardly be decent of him. It would be too precipitous — too patent. And besides, he owed something to the memory of the girl who had taught him, by her very constancy to Macklin, how much he had yet to learn about women, and about himself. So that he struggled to give value for value to the company which employed him, while, as a matter of fact, he was worth, during that week, hardly the rental of the space he occupied. But it was a tribute to his altered self that he recognized it.

Adams, who was floating through his days with the face of a reprieved convict and the title of advertising manager, wouldn't permit him to lose sight of his less tender opportunity.

"The Judge says that without Garrity we probably can't even get Kent indicted," he protested. "Garrity's gone for good, but if Eddie won't come back of his own accord, we could have him extradited like rolling off a log. Conspiracy? When he was city counsel? We'd have Kent breaking rock on the streets until his ransom does the general coffers fill. *Sure* Eddie'd get his, too. What do *we* care what happens to Eddie?"

"I care a good deal," said Egan soberly.

"Not that I think he was anything more than a cats-paw, but —"

"But I don't care to press it, Uncle Stanley."

Adams looked wise. "Still, you know if you help conceal a conspiracy —"

"I'm the only one that's hurt, Uncle Stanley. The other people are going to get their money back. And the question of the Light and Power Company isn't for us to handle — it's up to the city."

Adams was disconsolate. "And let Kent go?" he mourned. "Let him keep on swaggering around town as though he owned the mortgage on it?"

"He won't be happy about it," said Egan grimly. "He'll know *I* know. The Judge is going to tell him."

Indeed, towards the end of the week, Mr. Kent, who had ill-advisedly put his faith in sheer luck, and depended on it for immunity, knew all about it. The Honourable George Perkins waited ceremoniously upon him, and Mr. Kent, striving to retain his military bearing, and his attitude of command, found that he was in process of being dominated by a carelessly-dressed old man who had nothing but the consciousness of justice back of him.

"I think," said the Honourable George, not the least unbending, "you know what I've come for."

Mr. Kent, behind the rampart of his mahogany desk, affected genial innocence.

"How should I?"

The Honourable George could put lightning into his eyes when he had the inclination, and he had it now. "It's about the example your young friend Macklin has set you."

"Example?" Kent scowled. "That's a matter we won't talk about, Mr. Perkins." It was common, and more or less sympathetic, gossip, that the flight of his daughter had very nearly broken the Colonel's heart. But Perkins, pitying the man in his capacity of parent, had little compassion for him as a mere integer of the community. In fact, it was nothing but the Judge's conception of his duty as a lawyer which restricted him to the carrying out of his client's wishes. Even now, he was almost inclined to fall back upon his rights as the executor of Old Man Egan's estate, and leave mercy for other people to practise.

"I'm afraid we'll have to talk about it," said the Honourable George, lowering his tremendous lashes. "You see, I'm representing quite a lot of different people. I'm the executor of Old Man Egan's estate, and I'm Bronson Egan's attorney. I'm Mrs. McCain's attorney — in fact. I'm retained for Mrs. Garrity — Big Bill's widow. I'm representing Little . . . er, John C. Jones, also an Egan stockholder. I'm representing the combined interests of Henry C. Pennypacker and seven other small stockholders who also bought stock through Macklin from the Citizens Trust. I'm representing, locally, Mr. Darragh de Lancey of the Industrial Furlough Section, in Washington. I'm representing, by an arrangement made yesterday evening, Mr. Martin Henderson. Is that enough?"

"I congratulate you," said Kent dryly. "Your practice seems to be improving." Nevertheless, the mention of Garrity's name made him restive. He had been hoping against hope. "What do you seem to want from me?"

The Judge made a last attempt to spare him the bald recital.

"Do you need to ask?"

"I *have* asked."

The Honourable George drew a long breath. "I hoped you'd see for yourself. . . . Well, I guess you've made enough money to last you awhile. If I was in your place,— mind you, this is man to man, just this part right in here — if I was in your place, I'd go South or somewhere for the rest of the winter, anyway, and look around from there, and see if I couldn't find a nice spot to think of settling in."

Kent grew suddenly crimson. "Do you realize what you're saying?" He brought out a cigarette case, and abruptly returned it to his pocket.

"I ought to. I'm a lawyer, and I thought it over considerable long enough." His manner altered slightly. "Kent, I'm only making a suggestion to you. This is man to man. You've been a King-pin here —"

"I am yet."

The Honourable George disputed it with a backhand gesture.

"I won't argue that with you. . . . I'm still speaking as man to man. My unprofessional advice to you is to be as calm as you can about it, make what explanations you think are necessary, and shut up shop."

Kent lighted a match on the underside of his desk, and absently blew it out.

"Shut up —?"

"Retire," said Perkins.

The capitalist toyed with the burnt match. "I'm

glad your advice is free, Perkins. I'd hate to have to pay anything for that sort of advice."

"I've already said that *that* advice was as man to man. Personally, it's immaterial to me. Now, on the other side . . . I'm speaking as an attorney, now; I'm authorized to bring action against you, in the name of Bronson Egan, and several minor stockholders in The Egan Company, for —"

Kent was crouched in his chair as though to spring at him.

"For what?"

"For staying in Plainfield after the first day of next month," said Perkins, mildly.

The capitalist relaxed, and put the utmost of scorn into his voice.

"Oh! A little stuffed club? You've forgotten yourself for once, Perkins. You certainly put your foot in the bucket that time. In law, there's a name for that."

"You're mistaken. And I'm not making any threats. The action'll be brought *any*way. But if you're out of the state by the first of the month, I'm afraid you can't be brought back. That shows it ain't a criminal case — if you didn't know it, Kent. And I'm instructed not to get an order to serve you by publication. I'm to serve you in person, or not at all."

Kent broke the match between his fingers. "What's the amount of the claim?"

"The total is seven hundred thousand dollars."

"That's ridiculous on the face of it! If a reasonable compromise —"

"*I* can't think of any compromise that would sound

reasonable to Bronson Egan. Can you? I tell you, those stockholders are mighty generous about it. And if it wasn't for Bronson's feeling about prosecuting Mary Kent's *father* — and you can take it from me, that's all that stands between you and serious trouble —"

The capitalist's face was suddenly distorted. "You wouldn't even expect to win your suit, and you know it."

"I can't agree with you . . . juries these days aren't capitalistic. And The Egan Company was on war contracts. And you'd subsidized the *Times* when they printed a good deal about The Egan Company. And you can guess, if you want to, what sort of other case *might* take a start out of this action. And — Eddie'll come back if he's wanted. I tell you, Bronson's giving you a chance you don't deserve. So are the other folks. It's not to save you; it's to save the reputation of the dozen or more industries you're concerned in. It's to keep Plainfield from a stench that would carry from here to the Atlantic seaboard. It's public-spirit; that's what *I* call it. *You* call it anything you want to. And by the Lord Harry! I wish you'd stand and fight!" His voice dropped to a mere whisper. "I'd love to try that case myself," he said.

Kent folded his arms to keep his hands out of sight, and gazed out of the window. Until today, he had cherished a faint belief that money could buy almost anything.

"What assurance would there be that your clients would relinquish their claims?"

"All I can give you, legally — and my word, morally.

That is, they won't exactly relinquish 'em, but as I said, I'm instructed not to serve you by —"

"And — publicity? If I should — decide to take a vacation?"

The Judge was watching him narrowly.

"There'll be none. That is, unless . . . oh, Mr. Henderson particularly asked me to say that all the stock of the corporation that bought the *Times* is owned, itself, by a New Jersey corporation — and he owns all but two shares of stock in that."

Kent turned his head slowly. "That's very . . . interesting. Am I to take his word, too? You're not offering a lot of security, Perkins . . ."

The Judge flared up instantly. "You can count on more fairness than you ever gave Bronson, anyway. Man, can't you see when you're in luck? I'll guarantee the *Times* will print whatever notice of your retirement you care to write." As Kent's eyes flickered, the old lawyer added: "Henderson owns the *Herald*, too. . . ."

The capitalist turned again, his hands clasped behind his head, to stare out of the window. Perkins waited patiently.

"So you think I'd better retire, do you?"

"It seems to me sort of diplomatic."

"Diplomatic . . . yes," Kent smiled elusively. "But you'd lose a thundering good fee, then, wouldn't you?"

"That doesn't interest me in the slightest."

"No, I don't suppose it does."

The Judge ignored the sneer. "Henderson's willing to pay you the market valuation on everything you own

here, from the Citizens Trust to Air Traffic. Especially those two."

Kent's forehead gathered a suspicious wrinkle or two.

"Oh! That kind of retirement. You might almost say a freeze-out, mightn't you?"

"At a good profit to you," nodded the Judge. "Market values."

Kent's smile was funereal. "I'll think it over."

"You have."

"I don't quite get that?"

The Judge articulated very clearly. "I say, you *have* thought it over. All you need to. It's time for action."

"You certainly don't expect me to make a snap decision —"

"Unfortunately, I do. Before I leave the office."

"You expect too much."

"But the forms for the last edition of the *Times* close in an hour. I have with me a little article —" He produced it carefully —"all set up, and ready to release. You'll observe it's just a preliminary announcement —"

Kent read it avidly, and seemed relieved.

"I see. . . . And if you shouldn't have cause to run this, I suppose you'd run something a little . . . what shall I say . . . rough?"

"I'm not in Mr. Henderson's confidence to that extent. But there's nothing rough about this. Just says that you and Luke have made plans to turn over your holdings to —"

"Yes, I read it . . . oh, *Luke?*"

"I thought you'd rather take it up with him than have me do it, wouldn't you?"

"W-e-e-l — And we're to have until the first of the month, are we?"

"It depends entirely on how much you're willing to spend on your defence after that. . . . By the way, Bronson wants it specifically understood that this doesn't affect *Henry* Luke. It's only his father."

Kent, who had dreamed of power far beyond the confines of this single city, exhaled softly. He knew Perkins, he knew Henderson — and he knew Egan. He had unlimited confidence in the power of the dollar, but he appreciated that the Henderson faction could afford to hazard three to his one. And he knew that he could never expect to live down the revelations. On the other hand, there was his distinction intact, and his fortune unimpaired, if he merely drifted out of Plainfield on the tide of discovery. He stared out of the window until even the Honourable George's patience was taxed.

Then he dropped his arms, and swung towards his desk, and re-read, twice, the typewritten pages which Perkins had put before him. Conservative, laudatory within the obvious facts, accurate as to names and dates. . . .

Without glancing at the Honourable George, the capitalist flipped the typescript across the desk. He looked very worn and tired.

"Run it," he said. "I'll see Luke myself."

XXX

EGAN went over to Dayton on the slowest snail of a train which ever crawled at fifty miles an hour all the way; and a thousand times en route he told himself that if the airplane had any human value, it should be used exclusively by young men hurrying to a rendezvous. The only relief he had was from the perusal of a letter, written twenty words to the page, which he read every ten miles.

"Dear Mr. Egan:

"I arived here Thursday, and I am writeing to tell you how perfectly sweet Ferncliff is. I think it is the loveliest place. Nothing can ever erase from me the thought of how perfectly *fine* you and Judge Perkins are and mother to let me come here. My greatest wish is to do well in everything and I am in love with everything already. I think it is the loveliest place. My room mate is the sweetest thing. Please accept my most sincere thanks. I think you were perfectly *fine* and Judge Perkins and mother to send me.

"Cordially and sincerely yours,

"Millicent McCain."

It was half-past five when he arrived; far too late to call at Henderson's office, and infinitely too early to call at Henderson's house. That is, without first telephoning. . . . After striking a balance of the desirabilities, he telephoned the house, and not the office.

Martha's voice was rich with welcome, but it also

held a precipitate of reserve which disturbed him. She invited him to come up for dinner, and to come at once, and her invitation included the statement that this was a simple matter of course; but that underlying note of insecurity, with its almost indistinguishable hint of complications, caused him to linger for a moment outside the telephone booth, even after he had promised to come with all possible speed. He had reached that stage of a lover's mentality at which all things become automatic contradictions. He fancied that even her invitation was meant to be declined. He imagined that she said she wanted to see him only in order to tell him that she *didn't* want to see him.

An avalanche of vague potentialities fell upon him. Having arrived here for a set purpose, he wondered if he ought to carry it out. He wondered if he were too early; he wondered if he were too late. He finally hurried to a taxicab with all the apprehensions of one beset by ambiguity. He counted the street-crossings, and cursed the traffic rules which limited the speed of taxicabs to something less than the speed of projectiles. Leaving the chauffeur tipless and profane, he bolted up the steps. There he debated again whether he ought to tempt Fate or not. He rang and fidgeted. Waited, questioning whether to ring again, or to fidget a little longer. . . .

Martha, highly flushed and very lovely, opened the door to him. "Come in, come in," she said.

Egan still fidgeted. "If it isn't perfectly convenient for you — I couldn't quite make out —"

"Of course it is," she assured him. "But maybe it won't be so convenient for *you* —" She drew him

through the doorway; compelled him to doff his coat. From hanging it in the little closet under the stairs, he turned to behold her enveloped in the big kitchen apron she had dropped behind a hall-chair when she let him in. "The cook's left and the waitress has the influenza and the maid's out," she explained. "I'm doing the best I can, but —"

Egan was flooded with masculine compassion for a woman compelled to do a woman's work.

"Why, you poor child! You won't want *me* —"

She waved him gaily towards the kitchen.

"I can stand it if you and Father can. He's due any minute. Come on out and help." Obediently he followed her. "The roast's in the oven, and the dessert's ice-cream, and I've made the salad, and I was just going to start the soup . . . it's canned . . . oh, I know! You can set the table, if you want to. Do you know how?"

"I don't want to," said Egan, stubbornly. "I didn't come all the way over here from Plainfield to rattle china in the dining-room when you're broiling out in the kitchen all alone."

"It's very safe," said Martha. She laughed under her breath. "I'm not afraid to be alone. I could call to you if I needed anything."

He couldn't exclude the tremor from his voice.

"That's just the trouble. I'm afraid you might not call."

"Well — suppose we both set the table, then?"

"Now that," said Egan, "is more like a business arrangement."

Accordingly, they went about it, and from that very

moment, a sudden cloud of excessive courtesy settled over them. Both were acutely sensitive to the unnaturalness of it, but it overpowered them.

"Is this the way you like the carving things?"

"That's exactly the way, thank you. . . . Oh, Mr. Egan, would you rather have coffee here, or in front of the fire, afterwards?"

Egan gave the momentous subject the benefit of serious thought.

"Here, I think. It's less work for you, isn't it? Only — why so much formality?"

"Did I call you . . . oh! I'm sorry. I meant 'Bronson.' We'll have it by the fire, then. I'm sure we'll all like it better."

"It's all right as long as you feel guilty enough to blush about it. About being so formal."

She faced him indignantly.

"I'm not blushing! I've been standing over a hot stove. Out in the kitchen it's a hundred and ninety —"

"If . . . if it makes you look as lovely as that, I . . . I wish. . . . Shall I put on these big goblets?"

Her words were carefully measured, but she was losing poise with every syllable.

"If you will, please. Now we're all done but the silver. . . . We'd better hurry; Father'll be home any minute now, and . . . I'll get the knives, if you'll . . . all right, *you* get the knives, then."

Among the miscellany of the dinner service their hands touched. Both of them started. "You seem predestined to do housework over here," she said. "The only other time you came —"

"I wondered why you didn't go out to a hotel tonight."

"Father has to spend so much of his life in hotels. This'll be the biggest kind of a lark to him. And I like to do it, really."

"You wouldn't if you had to."

She didn't look at him.

"I'm not sure that I wouldn't."

"*I* am." Egan stood above her, and Martha, the self-controlled and ever so efficient, had a moment of great inefficiency. "But you won't have to — ever."

Sureness was eluding him, but admirably he counterfeited it. "Put those things down," he said.

"W-why?" Nevertheless, she obeyed. She put them down half way, and dropped them the rest of the way.

Egan took her hands, both of them. "I can't wait a second longer . . . dear," he said, unsteadily. "You know — don't you?"

Sureness was absolutely gone from him, he hadn't a word more to say. There was too much to express. He hoped she understood. For the very life of him, there wasn't another word to say. Not until she had given him some sign, some intimation. . . . Standing there, he had a blinding vision of the years of vanity which had preceded this moment, the years of proud aggression. Success had come to him, self-esteem of the durable sort had come to him only when he had learned the humility she had tried to teach him. Such as he was, he was of her own making. And as a lover he was masterful without, but very humble within.

Slowly she lifted her head. Those lovely eyes of hers had infinite tenderness in them, infinite timidity. She lowered them for an instant to the little gold pin in his knitted tie, and raised them bravely to meet his own.

"Don't *you?*" she whispered.

THE END